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HELPS TO COMPOSITION;

OR,

SIX HUNDRED

SKELETONS OF SERMONS;

SEVERAL

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF SERMONS PREACHED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY:

BY THE

REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M. A.

FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not
to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. ST. PAUL.*

VOL. III.

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^a Preached after the battle of the Nile.

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^c At the time of the Northern confederacy.


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^e This is particularly proper also for THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

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⁶ Preached at the COMMÉMORATION of Benefactors before the University; but applicable to other occasions.

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THE PARABLES.

CCXX. THE USE AND INTENT OF PARABLES.

Matt. xiii. 13—15. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

IT is certain that parabolical representations are, for the most part, obscure, and difficult to be understood. It may well therefore be a subject of enquiry, Why our blessed Lord adopted that method of instructing his auditors, in preference to a plain undisguised declaration of the truth? This very question was agitated among his own disciples, who not being able to satisfy themselves respecting it, intreated an answer from himself upon the point*. The reply which our Lord made to it is the subject of our present consideration. We shall

I. Explain the general import of the text

The Jews in our Lord's time were extremely averse to receive instruction

[Never were any people more blinded by prejudice than they: they heard our Lord only with a view to cavil at his word; and asked questions of him only that they might ensnare him; and though they were constrained to acknowledge that he spake as never man spake, they would not receive his testimony. They saw his word confirmed by numerous, and most stupendous miracles; and yet, instead of yielding to conviction, they were always asking for more signs. Rather than confess the hand of God in the wonders wrought by him, they ascribed them to the devil: and when that refuge failed them, they sought to destroy both him and Lazarus, lest his
having

* Ver. 10.

having raised the dead should induce the people to believe on him. The instant they saw the drift of his discourses, they accused him of opposing the law of Moses, and of blasphemy against God. In short, they shut their eyes against the light, and determinately resisted all the methods used for their conversion and salvation.]

They exactly accorded with the description long before given of them by the prophet

[The words of the prophet in their *literal* sense, were an order to him to go and preach to the people, though he was apprised beforehand that they would not listen to him, or be converted by him. But they looked forward also to the times of the gospel, and were a prophecy, that when Christ and his apostles should preach to the Jews, the greater part of the nation being blinded by their own prejudices and passions, would determinately set themselves against the truth. In this sense the words were applied by St. Paul to those who rejected his ministry^b; and in this sense our Lord represents them as accomplished in his hearers.]

It was this state of their minds that induced him to adopt the plan of teaching them by parables

[The people shut their eyes against plain truths; and therefore our Lord taught them in an obscure way.

But here arises a question; Was the people's blindness a *reason* for our Lord's teaching them by parables? or, was our Lord's teaching them by parables the *intentional cause* of their blindness?

Beyond a doubt, the former of these positions seems more consonant with the general character of our Lord. But the more obvious construction of his words seems rather to favour the latter sentiment.

The language of prophecy is sometimes exceeding strong; and the prophets are said to *do*, what they only foretel as certainly to happen^c; consequently, when the prophecies are quoted, they are frequently to be understood in rather a lower sense than the words at first sight appear to bear. Accordingly the prophecy as quoted by our Lord represents him as speaking to the people in parables, *not on purpose to blind them*, but with the lamentable prospect of their rejecting his message, and of their shutting their eyes, as if they were afraid of seeing the light, and of being converted by it.

Yet there is an objection to this solution, namely, that both St. Mark and St. Luke make our Lord speak directly an opposite language^d. But to this we answer, that neither of these

^b Acts xxviii. 25—27.

^c Jer. i. 10. Ezek. xliiii. 3.

^d Mark iv. 11, 12. and Luke viii. 10.

these evangelists expressly quotes the prophecy, as St. Matthew does; they only allude to it: and therefore may be considered rather as using the words in an accommodated sense. And indeed St. Mark's own declaration in ver. 33. that "with many such parables spake he the word unto them, *as they were able to hear it,*" shews clearly, that what he before spake in allusion to the prophecy, must be understood in a sense that can be reconciled with the declaration itself: for otherwise there would be an absolute contradiction between his two assertions. But they perfectly accord with each other, if we interpret the former as importing, that our Lord spake to the people in parables, that they might see (sufficient to instruct them) and not perceive (the full drift of his discourses, which would make them only turn away from him in disgust) *if peradventure*^e he might (by this cautious method of instructing them) convert and save their souls.

Thus there was in this way of teaching, something favourable, and something judicial. The people set themselves against the truth; *therefore* our Lord withheld his plainer instructions from them: but he did so, not with a view to increase, but rather to remove, their blindness.]

Having fixed the meaning of the text itself, we proceed, in answer to the apostles' question, to

II. State more particularly our Lord's reasons for teaching by parables

In the whole of his ministry our Lord was influenced by benevolence. More especially in addressing the people by parables, he sought

1. To counteract their prejudices

[They were determined to reject every thing that opposed their prejudices, or their passions, and on no account to admit the idea of a suffering Messiah. The only way therefore of bringing them to acknowledge any truth, was to present it to them in such a view that they should not discern its real scope. When they saw the bearing of any question that was put to them, they would not return an answer^f: but,
when

^e Here the translation of the word *μήποτε*, upon which the whole depends, is altered from *lest*, to *if peradventure*. But it occurs in a parallel passage, where it is actually so translated, and where, unless it were so rendered, there would be no sense at all. See 2 Tim. ii. 25. Indeed, if it be not so translated in St. Mark, our Lord must be understood to say, that he preached unintelligibly to them *for fear they should be converted*. But surely, this is a motive which we would not willingly ascribe to him, especially when his words so easily admit of a very different interpretation.

^f Matt. xxi. 23—27.

when they could see no reference to themselves, they answered readily enough^g: and by this means they were often made to criminate themselves before they perceived the tendency of their own acknowledgements^h. As David in the parable of the ewe lamb condemned with most excessive severity a conduct somewhat similar to his own, and thereby pronounced sentence against himself, when he would have denied or extenuated his guilt, if it had been charged home upon him in a more open way; so, by taking them unawares, our Lord often succeeded in confounding, and sometimes in converting, those, who would have rejected his testimony at once, if they had observed at first the full scope of his instructions.]

2. To prepare them for fuller instructions

[Our Lord was willing to impart knowledge, if the people had been capable of receiving it: but it was necessary that they who had lived in such gross darkness, should be brought gradually to the light, lest they should be overpowered by too hasty a transition to the full radiance of gospel truth. He told even his own disciples, that he had many things to say unto them; but was constrained to withhold them for the present, because of their incapacity to receive themⁱ: he thought it proper to educate them as children, that he might gradually inform their minds, and mature their judgment. And this was the intent also of all his public ministrations; he administered milk to the people as babes, that they might, when grown to full age, be nourished by the strong meat which he intended afterwards to set before them.]

3. To render them without excuse if they should reject his word

[Had his instructions been unseasonably clear and full, the people might have cast some reflection on their teacher as injudicious. But when he so condescended to their weakness, “they had no cloke for their sin;” they were altogether without excuse; and it was manifest beyond a doubt, that the only reason of their rejecting him was, that “they loved darkness rather than light^k.” The judgments that were to be brought upon them, were such as never had been experienced from the foundation of the world; this opportunity therefore of filling up the measure of their iniquities was given to the people of that generation, that the equity of the divine procedure might be more manifest in their destruction.]

Let

^g Luke vii. 43.

^h Matt. xxi. 28—32. & xxii. 41—46.

ⁱ John xvi. 12.

^k John iii. 19.

Let us LEARN from hence

1. The folly and danger of prejudice in those who hear the gospel

[Such is the force of prejudice that it will blind the eyes, and shut the ears, and make the heart impenetrably hard. Yet how many indulge it without being at all aware of their danger! They have taken up the notion that salvation by faith is injurious to morality, and that vital godliness is enthusiasm; and will receive nothing that militates against their preconceived opinions. But let the fate of the Jews convince us of the folly and danger of such conduct: and let us seek from God that "honest and good heart," that shall embrace with readiness, and improve with care, whatever God has revealed in his word.]

2. The need of wisdom in those who minister the gospel

[Much harm has been done to the interests of religion by an unguarded declaration even of the truth itself. Men should be considered as having prejudices which may be increased by indiscretion, or undermined by a prudent exhibition of the gospel. St. Paul, though as far as any man from a want of zeal, was peculiarly attentive to this duty¹; and has left us instructions respecting it for the regulation of our own conduct^m. The end of the ministry is to convert and save the souls of men: and whatever is best adapted to that end, is most worthy of our pursuit. No one should conceal the truth through the fear of man; nor should any one be backward to put a veil upon his face, when the brightness of it would defeat the end of his ministrations. Zeal and prudence should be duly combined in those to whom the care of souls is committed; and if in this respect we imitate our Lord and his apostles, we may reasonably hope that we shall not run in vain, or labour in vain.]

¹ Acts xx. 20. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.

^m Heb. v. 12—14.

CCXXI. THE NATURE AND NECESSITY OF REGENERATION.

John iii. 3. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

AS there is an essential distinction between divine and human knowledge, so is there a very great difference in

the ways by which each of them is to be obtained ; the one being attainable only by rational investigation, the other only by faith—Reason indeed must judge whether such or such things be revealed ; but when that point is clearly ascertained, faith must receive the truth simply on the authority of God ; and that too, no less when it lies beyond the sphere of our reason, than when it may easily be comprehended by it—The manner in which revealed truths are inculcated seems to imply this ; for the prophets enforced their declarations, not with arguments, but with, “ Thus saith the Lord : ” and our Saviour, with an authority which none but himself ever presumed to exercise, and which strongly marked his equality with the Father, disdained to use any other confirmation than that of his own assertion : this appears, as in numberless other passages, so particularly in his conversation with Nicodemus ; when, instructing him in the mysterious doctrine of regeneration, he required a full assent to it upon the testimony of his own word—May we bow to his authority, while we consider

I. The nature of regeneration

The mistakes which very generally obtain respecting this subject being first rectified, the truth will be more clearly seen—

Many suppose that baptism is the same with regeneration

[In the early ages of Christianity these terms were often used as synonymous, because it was taken for granted that none but truly regenerate persons would submit to a rite which engaged them to separate themselves from an ungodly world, and exposed them to the most imminent peril of their lives—But there is a wide difference between the two ; regeneration being absolutely necessary to salvation, while baptism, as in the case of the dying thief, may under some circumstances be dispensed with—Besides, it was doubtless the great design of our Lord and his apostles to regenerate and convert men : but were they so intent on administering the rite of baptism ? Our Lord, we are told, “ baptized no man ; ” and it is said of Paul, that “ God sent him not to baptize ; ” yea, he himself “ thanks God that he had baptized none but Crispus and Gaius : ” but if he had regenerated none other, would he have thought *that* a proper ground for thanksgiving ?—Again, if baptism and regeneration be the same thing, we may use them altogether as synonymous terms : now it is

said that “Whosoever is born of God overcometh the world ;” and that “he neither *doth* sin nor *can* sin, because he is born of God.” But if we should say the same of all that are baptized, would not the worldly and sinful lives of many flatly contradict us?—It appears then from the superior importance of regeneration, from the design of Christ and his apostles respecting it, and from the properties ascribed to it in scripture, that it neither is nor can be the same with baptism—Baptism is an outward work of man upon the body ; regeneration is an inward work of God upon the soul—]

Others think that regeneration imports no more than an outward reformation, or, at most, a partial change of the inward man

[But can we conceive that, when a ruler of the Jews came to our Lord, acknowledging him to be a teacher sent from God, and desiring to be instructed in those things which he was come to reveal, our Lord would tell him that wicked men could not be saved without reforming their lives? Did Nicodemus need such information as that? Or, if this was all that our Lord meant, would this teacher in Israel have been so astonished at it? And would not our Lord have instantly rectified his misapprehension, and shewn him that there was no cause for astonishment? Can we imagine that our Lord would have confirmed the mistake, by representing this doctrine as an incomprehensible mystery, which man can no more fathom, than he can ascertain the hidden causes, or mark the exact boundaries, of the wind? Yea, would he have left this man so bewildered, saying, How can these things be! if he had meant no more than, that a wicked man must reform his life?—Nor is it less evident that regeneration does not consist in a partial change even of the inward man. To what purpose should we boast of having experienced the illumination of Balaam ^c, the humiliation of Ahab ^d, the confession of Judas ^e, the faith of Simon Magus ^f, the confidence of the unbelieving Jews ^g, the attention of Ezekiel’s auditors ^h, the reformation of Herod ⁱ, or (what perhaps includes all these together) the promising appearance of the stony-ground hearers ^k, if, like them, we rest in any partial change? Surely, if our righteousness exceed not theirs, we cannot hope that we shall be happier than they in our final doom—]

In opposition to all such erroneous notions, the scripture itself defines regeneration to be “a new creation, wherein

^a 1 John v. 4.

^c Numb. xxiv. 4.

^e Matt. xxvii. 4.

^g John viii. 41, 42.

ⁱ Mark vi. 20, 27.

^b 1 John iii. 9.

^d 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^f Acts viii. 13, 21, 23.

^h Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

^k Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

wherein old things pass away, and ALL things become new¹.”

[The author of this work is the Holy Spirit, who by a supernatural agency renews our inward man, and makes us partakers of a divine nature^m—Our faculties indeed remain the same as they were before; but there is a new direction given to them all—Our *understanding* is enlightened, so that we behold ourselves, and Christ, and the world, yea, every thing else too, in a very different light from what we ever did beforeⁿ——Our *will* is changed, so that instead of following, or even desiring to follow, our own way, we surrender up ourselves altogether to God’s government, saying most unfeignedly, not my will, but thine be done^o——Our *affections* also are exercised in a very different manner from what they were before, so that, instead of being called forth principally by the things of time and sense, they are set upon things spiritual and eternal^p——We say not that this change is perfect in any man, (for there still are sad remains of the old and corrupt nature even in the best of men; the leprosy is never wholly removed till the walls be taken down)—But the change is universal in all the faculties, and progressive throughout our lives: nor can it be effected by any efforts of man, or by any other power than that of God^q—]

As the scriptures give this extensive view of regeneration, so they fully declare

II. The necessity of it

“The kingdom of God” sometimes imports the kingdom of grace on earth, and sometimes the kingdom of glory in heaven—Indeed both are one and the same kingdom, subject to the same head, composed of the same members, and governed by the same laws: grace is glory begun; glory is grace consummated—But for the purpose of illustrating our subject, we observe that, without regeneration,

1. We cannot enter into God’s kingdom of grace

[There are many duties to be performed, and many privileges to be enjoyed, by the subjects of God’s spiritual kingdom, which an unregenerate man can *neither perform nor enjoy*—Who can doubt whether it be our duty to “repent in dust and ashes,” to “live by faith on the Son of God,” or to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts?” But can an unregenerate man do these things? We acknowledge that he may restrain in many respects his outward conduct; but can he

root

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

ⁿ Acts ii. 37—47.

^p Col. iii. 2.

^m 2 Pet. 1—4.

^o Acts ix. 6.

^q John i. 13.

root out from his heart the *love* of the world, and the *love* of sin? Can he truly lothe and abhor himself as well for the unhallowed corruptions of his heart as for the grosser transgressions of his life?—As well may he attempt to create a world as to effect these things by any power of his own—Again; it is the Christian's privilege to enjoy that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," to "abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost," and to be transported with that "joy which is unspeakable and full of glory"—But can an unregenerate man possess that peace, when his iniquities are not forgiven? Can he look forward with delight to the coming of the day of Christ, when all his desires and pursuits terminate in this lower world? Can he be so elevated with holy joy, when there is nothing in his state which does not rather call for rivers of tears?—But if any one doubt what answer he must return to these questions, let him go to his chamber, and see whether he be competent to form his mind to these sublime employments; and he will soon find that no power but that which created our souls at first, can form them anew after the divine image—]

2. We cannot enter into the kingdom of glory

[*There is a meetness for the heavenly inheritance*^r, which every one must attain, before he can enjoy the felicity of the saints in light—As, on earth, no occupation can afford us pleasure, if we have not an inward taste and relish for it, so, in heaven, we must have dispositions suited to the state of those above—But where is this disposition to be obtained, if not in this life? Can it be thought that there shall be "repentance in the grave," and that we shall become regenerate in a future state? Shall he, who never supremely loved his God, become at once inflamed with devout affection towards him? Shall not he, who never was renewed after the divine image, rather behold with dread and horror the holiness of God, and tremble at the sight of that Lamb, whose dying love he despised, and whose blood he trampled under foot?—Shall he, who never sought one hour's communion with God in secret, delight to have no other employment to all eternity?—No; "as the tree falleth, so it lieth;" "he that was unjust will be unjust still; and he that was filthy will be filthy still"—As there is this reason on the part of man, so is there a still more cogent reason on the part of God—*God has declared*, with repeated and most solemn asseverations, that "*except a man be born again, he shall never enter into his kingdom:*" and has he spoken thus merely to alarm us? "Is he a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent?" Will he dishonour himself to favour us? Will he violate the rights of justice, holiness

^r Col. i. 12.

holiness and truth, in order to save those, who, to their dying hour, rejected and despised his proffered mercy?—Let us not deceive ourselves with such vain hopes, which can terminate in nothing but disappointment and ruin—]

ADDRESS

1. The unregenerate

[You cannot surely be at a loss to know your real state, if you will examine candidly whether you have ever experienced such a change in your views, desires, and pursuits, as has been before described?—O, let every one put home to his conscience this question, *Am I born again?*—And know that neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision will avail you any thing, but a new creation^s—*You must be born again, or perish* — — —]

2. The regenerate

[St. Peter, writing to such persons under the severest persecution, begins his epistle with congratulations^t: and St. Paul bids us under the heaviest calamities to be thankful for renewing grace^u—Do ye then bless God in every state, and “shew forth the *virtues* of him who hath called you to his kingdom and glory^x” — — —]

^s Gal. vi. 15.

^u Col. i. 11—13.

^t 1 Pet. i. 1, 3, 4. ^f

^x Ἀρετὰς. 1 Pet. ii. 9.

CCXXII. THE LIVING WATER.

John iv. 14. *Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.*

OUR Lord invites us to learn of him—To encourage us, he declares that he is meek and lowly in heart—Never was this disposition more displayed than in his conversation with the Samaritan woman—She was of the most abandoned character; yet he condescended to instruct her—And, when she slighted his proffered mercies, endeavoured to recommend them to her more favourable acceptance—We shall consider

I. What is that water which Christ will give

The woman understood our Lord only in a literal sense—But in his words there was a mystical meaning

By-

By the water which he offered her, he meant the Holy Ghost

[The Holy Spirit is often represented in the scriptures under the figure of water—It is he of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks when he says, that God will pour out water upon thirsty souls^a—Ezekiel also explains himself as referring to him, when he promises to the church, in Jehovah's name, that clean water should be sprinkled on them to cleanse them from their pollutions^b—We are taught by God himself to put this interpretation on similar expressions used by our Lord^c—By the help of these passages we ascertain beyond a doubt the import of that before us—]

This water he had full authority to give

[Jesus had not received the Spirit by measure only, like other prophets^d—He had the residue of the Spirit abiding in him^e—Yea, he had all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him bodily^f—As mediator he was commissioned and empowered to bestow this Spirit^g—Hence he frequently arrogated to himself this power^h—He actually exerted it while he continued upon earthⁱ—And in a more abundant measure after his exaltation to heaven—The effusion of the Spirit on the day of pentecost is expressly ascribed to him^k—Hence we may understand why the Holy Ghost is so emphatically called *the Spirit of Christ*^l—]

To excite her desire after it, he proceeded to set before her

II. The properties it possesses

Contrasting it with that which he had solicited at her hands, he told her it was

1. Satisfying in its nature

[Water from an earthly spring will quench the thirst only for a short time—Nor will it at all allay our appetite for other things—The men of this world are insatiable in their desire after the vanities of time and sense—The more they have of pleasure, riches, or honour, the more they want^m—But a draught of this living water will satisfy the soul—Of this heavenly spring indeed, all who have once tasted, will wish

^a Isai. xlv. 3.

^b Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

^c John vii. 37—39.

^d John iii. 34.

^e Mal. ii. 15.

^f Col. i. 19. and ii. 9.

^g Ps. lxxviii. 18. with Eph. iv. 8. and Acts ii. 33. He received in order that he might give—.

^h *Thrice* did he claim this authority in his conversation with the Samaritan woman, and often afterwards in the plainest terms. John xv. 26. and xvi. 7. 14.

ⁱ John xx. 22.

^k Acts ii. 33. before cited.

^l 1 Pet. i. 11.

^m Job xx. 22.

wish to drink again—Yea, they will pant after it as the hart after the water-brooks—But their desire of earthly things will be greatly abated—The consolations of the Spirit will be regarded as the only satisfying portionⁿ—And they make every thing else appear insipid, as the beholding of the meridian sun will obscure the splendor of all inferior objects^o—]

2. Heavenly in its tendency

[The supplies of water in “a well” are constant and uniform—So the Spirit operates in the heart of man—There will indeed be seasons when his operations will be less manifest—But he will always reside in us as a principle of life^p—He will excite holy and heavenly affections in our breasts^q—He will keep heaven itself in our view^r—And the one aim of all his motions will be to lead us to everlasting life—Nor, if we cherish his motions, will he fail of bringing us to the possession of it^s—]

INFER

1. How glorious a person must Christ be!

[The Holy Spirit is God equal with the Father^t—Yet Christ has power to send him into our hearts—He can as easily bestow him on us, as we can give a cup of water from a spring—Even though the whole world should ask him, he could impart the Spirit to all of them at the same instant^u—Let us then entertain worthy thoughts of him—And look to him for constant supplies of this living water^x—]

2. How earnest should we be in our application for this heavenly gift!

[The worldly man is indefatigable in his pursuit of earthly vanities—But which of them can be compared with this living water?—Which of them can give us life? or satisfy the soul? or bring us to glory?—O that we might thirst after this, and this alone!—Then would the invitations of Christ be precious to our souls^y—And we should speedily receive his promised blessings^z—]

3. How dead ought we to be to all earthly things!

[Our Lord represents all who have received his Spirit as thirsting no more—Hence we can have no evidence that we have drunk of the living waters, but in proportion as our thirst for other things is abated—Let those, who profess to have the Spirit dwelling in them, consider this—The scriptures that confirm this truth are numberless^a—May God impress

ⁿ Isai. lv. 2. ^o Ps. lxxiii. 25. Phil. iii. 7, 8. ^p John xiv. 16, 17.

^q Gal. iv. 6. ^r Eph. i. 14. ^s Rom. viii. 13, 14.

^t Acts v. 3, 4. ^u See notes ^c and ⁿ. ^x Phil. i. 19. and

^y Rev. xxii. 17. ^z Isai. xli. 17, 18. John i. 16. .

^a Jam. iv. 4. John ii. 15—17. Rom. viii. 9.

impress them deeply on our hearts!—Let the world then be crucified unto us, and us unto the world^b—And if we would indeed be found partakers of Christ, let us both live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit^c—]

^b Gal. vi. 14.^c Gal. v. 24, 25.

CCXXIII. THE BEAM AND THE MOTE.

Matt. vii. 3—5. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

OBSERVATION and experience shew, that the less any person is acquainted with his own infirmities, the more he will be disposed to censure the infirmities of others—But as such a disposition is totally repugnant to that love which Christianity inculcates, our Lord cautioned his hearers against it, and taught them, in the parable before us, to scrutinize and reform themselves before they presumed to take upon themselves the office of censuring and reclaiming others—

In this parable we may observe

I. The evil of censoriousness

Censoriousness is a compound of pride and malice—It originates in an high conceit of our own worth, and a desire to reduce others to a level with ourselves, or to a state below us—It is an evil

1. Injurious to our neighbour

[Every person values his reputation, and esteems the loss of it as a great misfortune—But in judging any man with severity, or exposing needlessly his faults, we rob him of his good name, and impoverish him without enriching ourselves—How injurious such conduct is we may see, if we will only consider what we feel when we are rigorously or unjustly censured—The sensibility we manifest, and the keen resentment we express, are sufficient indications of the injury which we suppose ourselves at least to have sustained—]

2. Insulting

2. Insulting to our God

[God claims it as his prerogative to judge—As he alone is privy to all the circumstances of any case, he alone can judge of it aright—Besides, he has appointed a day wherein he will display his righteousness, in awarding to every one a judgment suited to his real character: and he requires us to defer our judgment till that time^a—But in taking upon ourselves to censure and condemn others we invade his prerogative, we usurp his power, we set ourselves in his throne, we supersede, or anticipate at least, his judgment—In this light censoriousness is often stated by God himself; and an holy indignation is invariably expressed against those who shall presume to indulge it^b—]

3. Hypocritical in itself

[The man who censures others professes an high regard for virtue, and a zeal for the honour of God—But what regard has he for virtue who does not cultivate it in his own soul? or what zeal has he for the honour of God, who does not bring his own heart into an obedience to his will?—Even supposing that he were not himself notoriously faulty in other respects (which supposition however will never be found true) how flagrant is his breach of duty at the very instant he pretends such a regard for duty!—He violates the most acknowledged principle of common equity; he acts not to others as in a change of circumstances he would think it right for them to act towards him; and therefore at the very instant he condemns others, he unwittingly condemns himself—Who does not see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who were indignant with our Lord for working miracles on the sabbath, while they themselves were conspiring against his life?—Such, in their degree, are all they, who are offended with a mote in their brother's eye while they have a beam in their own—Well therefore does our Lord address them by that humiliating appellation, “Thou hypocrite”—]

Our Lord having exposed the unreasonableness and impiety of this sin, subjoins

II. Advice to those who are addicted to it

The evil here reprobated is but too common, and *that* too, even among the professors of religion: yea, perhaps, (their profession not being sufficiently tempered with humility and love) they are more exposed to it than others, from a mistaken idea, that their professed regard for religion entitles

^a Rom. xiv. 10. 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^b Rom. xiv. 4. Jam. iv. 11, 12. and ii. 13.

entitles them, as it were, to the office of censors—But to every one who has been guilty of it we should say,

1. Consider your own great and manifold infirmities

[There is no greater antidote to censoriousness than this—While we continue ignorant of ourselves, we shall consider our own faults as few and venial, and shall be disposed to magnify whatever we may see amiss in others—But a knowledge of our own hearts will convince us that if there is “a mote in our brother’s eye, there is a beam in our own”—We may conceive many extenuating circumstances that may lessen the enormity of *his* conduct; but we shall know many aggravating circumstances, to which God and ourselves alone are privy, which may serve to heighten *our* guilt, and to humble us as the very chief of sinners—When the woman taken in adultery was brought to our Lord, he bade those of her accusers who were without sin to execute the law upon her—We all know the effect which a conviction of their own personal guilt produced upon them^c—Thus shall we also drop the stone which we have taken up to cast at our neighbour, when once we are acquainted with our own vileness—]

2. Recollect the relation in which he, whom you would condemn, stands to you

[As every person wishes to conceal his own faults, so he will be ready to extenuate the faults of those who are near and dear to him—We do not usually hear men descanting on the infirmities of their parents or children, their wife or brethren—Now the person, whom the calumniator would traduce, is his brother—No less than thrice in the short space of the text is this endearing appellation given to our neighbour—Is he not entitled then from this consideration to some portion of that regard which we pay to our more immediate relatives?—Should we officiously pry into his defects? Should we presume to criminate his motives? Should we judge of his general character by a single act; or take an instance or two of indiscretion, and consider them as fixed and accustomed habits?—Surely our “*brother*” should receive far different treatment at our hands—We should cast a veil over his infirmities, and exercise towards him that charity which hopeth all things and believeth all things^d—]

3. Purge your own heart from evil, that you may be the better qualified to reprove or advise others as occasion shall require

[As persons who dispense the laws must of necessity pass judgment on those who are brought before them, so must all the

^c John viii. 7. 9.

^d 1 Pet. iv. 8. 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

the members of Christ's church administer fraternal correction or reproof to each other^e—It is not *all* judgment that the text forbids, but all harsh and severe judgment—It prohibits an over-officious prying into the faults of others, and a needless exposing of them to the world; but it leaves us at liberty to give that reproof, which is necessary for the reclaiming of an offending brother—But to admonish others with effect, we must attain some measure at least of purity ourselves—Let every one then begin with rectifying his own conduct—Let every one be solicitous to cast the beam out of his own eye, that he may afterwards assist with more propriety and effect in pulling out the mote from his brother's eye—We must not indeed stay till we are perfect before we attempt to benefit our brother; but we should study to attain an unbiassed judgment, and regulate our endeavours with charity and discretion^f—]

^e Lev. xix. 17. Eph. v. 11.

^f Ver. 6.

CCXXIV. THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAYS.

Matt. vii. 13, 14. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in therat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

AN idea of candour and philanthropy leads many to adopt sentiments directly repugnant to the scriptures—They imagine that few, if any, perish; and that, though the bulk of mankind live in a total neglect of God, they find mercy at the last—But no pretence of candour should induce us so to contradict the plainest declarations of God—If there be any truth in the scriptures, there are comparatively few who go to heaven—And we need to be awakened to a sense of our danger by the exhortation before us—We shall consider

I. The duty enjoined

The path of the ungodly is broad, and the entrance upon it wide

[There is no difficulty at all in entering upon an ungodly life—We need only follow our natural bent and inclination—Nor will they who frequent the broad road at all interfere with each other—The gross sensualist, the proud Pharisee, and the specious hypocrite, may have ample scope for their respective

respective pursuits—Sin may be indulged in ten thousand shapes—And “all may go astray, every one in his own way^a”—]

The path of the godly is narrow and the entrance upon it strait

[The way of God’s commandments is that to which the godly are confined—And the entrance upon it is by conversion—A man must have seen the evil and danger of his former ways—He must have come to Christ who is “the door^b”—And, renouncing every other hope, he must cleave unto Christ with full purpose of heart—Having thus entered, he must go forward in an uniform course of *dependance upon* Christ, and *devotedness to him*—This is indeed a strait and narrow way—A partial repentance, a divided trust, a reserved obedience, will not suffice—Our contrition must be deep, our faith unfeigned, and our dedication of ourselves to God entire, or we shall only deceive our own souls—]

To enter upon this path is our bounden duty

[God never intended that men should follow the imagination of their own hearts—He calls us to himself, and invites us by every argument that can effect a rational being—Nor will he leave us to fail for want of strength—If we will exert ourselves in earnest and cry unto him for help, nothing shall be impossible unto us—Difficult as the duty is, it has been performed by many in all ages—We therefore should exert ourselves without delay—We must not stand aloof, doubting and hesitating whether we shall enter upon this way or not—Nor must we put off the time of entering upon it to some more convenient season—The command of God is clear and universal, Enter ye in at the strait gate—]

We shall see the importance of this duty if we attend to

II. The arguments with which it is enforced

No stronger arguments can be urged than those suggested in the text

1. The broad way, however crowded, will infallibly lead us to destruction

[Every way of sin will destroy the soul—Whether it be open and notorious, or secret and refined, it will surely bring upon us the wrath of God—Nor will the numbers of those who walk in any way at all affect *the quality* of their actions—Sin will be sin, though the whole world should countenance each

^a Isai. liii. 6.

^b John x. 9.

each other in the commission of it—the idolatrous compliance of the Babylonish nation was not the less sinful because it was sanctioned by numbers; nor was the non-conformity of the Hebrew youths rendered less acceptable to God on account of the fewness of those who dared to follow the voice of conscience^c—Neither indeed will *the end* of any way be changed on account of the numbers who walk in it—The inhabitants of Sodom, and of the antediluvian world were not exempted from punishment because they were many—They were overwhelmed as examples of God's vengeance to all future ages^d—Should not this then make us cautious what path we follow? Should it not stimulate us to flee from the destruction to which we are hastening?—Oh! “*strive to enter in at the strait gate*^e”—]

2. The narrow path, however unfrequented, will surely lead us to glory

[God cannot but delight in holiness—And he will testify his approbation of it in the last day—Was Lot overlooked in Sodom, or Noah in the antediluvian world?—So if there were but one faithful servant of God in the whole universe, he should in no wise lose his reward—Every step he took in the good way should be marked by God—And in due season he should arrive at his desired end—And, while tribulation and anguish should be assigned to the disobedient, his patient continuance in well-doing should be rewarded with glory and honour and immortality^f—Should any one then be afraid of singularity?—Is it not better to be a persecuted Elijah worshipping the true God, than to be an applauded worshipper of Baal?—Let the prospect of glory therefore encourage us to enter upon the narrow path—Nor let us doubt but that the enjoyment of the end will amply compensate for the difficulties of the way—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who are not yet entered in at the strait gate

[Perhaps you think that the multitudes by which you are countenanced, afford a reasonable hope that you shall not perish—But it is not possible for God to assert the contrary more strongly than he has done in the words before us—Will you then, in spite of this warning, hope that the saved shall be many, and the damned few?—Or will you be contented to perish, seeing that you will have so many companions in misery?—Alas! what comfort will it be to you to behold others as wretched as yourself?—Will their torments assuage
your

^c Dan. iii.

^e Luke xiii. 24.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 5, 6.

^f Rom. ii. 7—9.

your anguish?—Oh! dare to be singular in the midst of a wicked world—And say with Joshua, As for me, and my house, whatever others may do, we will serve the Lord^g—]

2. To those who are walking in the narrow way

[You, no doubt, are blamed for your singularity—But “it is a small matter to be judged of man’s judgment”—To be reproached for righteousness sake is no new thing—Nor have you any reason to repine if it be your lot—You have rather reason to rejoice and leap for joy^h—Remember, however, that you are not to affect needless singularities, and call them religion—If you bring persecution upon yourselves by such means, you bear your own cross, and not the cross of Christ—That alone which will be pleasing to God is, the following of *his* commandments—In *that* you cannot be too exact or resolute—But in *indifferent matters* it is desirable rather to manifest a meek and yielding dispositionⁱ—Yet compliance may easily be carried too far—And, on the whole, it is expedient always to lean to the safer side—You are in continual danger of being turned out of the good path—Nor can you be ever safe except while you are looking to God for his direction and help^k—]

^g Josh. xxiv. 15.

^h Matt. v. 10—12. 1 Pet. iv. 12—14.

ⁱ 1 Cor. ix. 19—23.

^k Ps. cxix. 117.

CCXXV. THE TREE KNOWN BY ITS FRUITS.

Luke vi. 43—45. *A good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit: for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

IT is of infinite importance to every man to attain a knowledge of his state and character before God—For, as such a knowledge would be the best preservative against a self-exalting and censorious spirit, so would it keep us from deluding ourselves with a merely nominal and torinal religion^a—In order to attain it we must examine our
words

^a See the context.

words and actions, and trace them to their proper source—Thus, by discovering what is in the heart, we shall be enabled to form a just estimate of our own character, and be guarded against a fatal presumption on the one hand, and a needless disquietude on the other—This mode of enquiry is suggested in the parable before us; which indeed deserves the more attention, because it was delivered by our Lord on several different occasions—There are two truths which it offers to our consideration

I. It is the heart that regulates the life

The heart is, as it were, a fountain, from whence all our actions proceed—

In it there is a treasure either of good or evil

[While we are unregenerate, we are full of erroneous principles, and sinful affections—We “think that God is even such an one as ourselves;” that he will neither “do good” to them that serve him, “nor evil” to those who rebel against him^b—We judge sin to be light and venial, and a worldly carnal life to be consistent with an hope of immortality and glory—While such are our principles, what can be expected, but that “our affections should be set on things below, and not on things above?”—Our hopes and fears, our joys and sorrows, are excited only by the things of time and sense: and those invisible realities, which alone deserve our esteem, are disregarded and despised—What a “treasure of evil” is thus formed within us^c! who can number our rebellions thoughts, our unhallowed desires, our vicious indulgences?—How has this treasure been accumulating from our earliest infancy to this present moment! and we, alas! are as averse to part with it as if it rendered us really happy, or would “profit us in the day of wrath”—The regenerate person, on the contrary, has within him a “treasure of good”—His principles and affections are the very reverse of what they once were—His views of God, of sin, and the world, are regulated by the holy scriptures; and his desires and pursuits are conformable to the dictates of religion—Thanks be to God, this treasure also is daily accumulating; and he esteems himself rich only in proportion as the love and fear of God increase in his heart—]

According as this treasure is, such will be the life

[The “waters flowing from a fountain” must of necessity be “bitter or sweet” according as the fountain itself is good or bad—So where a treasure of evil is in the heart, the words and actions must be evil also—“Out of the abundance

of

^b Ps. l. 21. Zeph. i. 12.

^c Mark vii. 21—23.

of the heart, the mouth will speak;" and by that great moving spring will all the members be actuated—Doubtless there may be a freedom from gross immorality, and a conduct in many respects amiable and praiseworthy, while yet the heart is unrenewed: but fruit that is really good can no more proceed from an unregenerate soul, than "figs and grapes from a thorn or bramble-bush"—On the other hand, where the treasure of the heart is good, the life will certainly be good also—An holy practice must of necessity flow from holy principles and heavenly affections—We say not indeed but that there may be found some faults even in the holiest of men, even as blighted or unsound fruit may be found upon the choicest tree—But the good can no more practise iniquity, so as to continue in it, than the bad can bring forth habitually the fruits of righteousness—St. John assigns the same reason as is suggested in the text, "He cannot sin, because the seed of God remaineth in him^d," and, as an operative principle, regulates his life—]

This truth being established, the other follows as a necessary consequence, viz.

II. By the life we must judge of the heart

Though we are not to scrutinize too nicely the motives by which others are actuated, so as to form an *uncharitable* judgment respecting them, yet we may, and *must* in some cases, judge of men by their actions—Our Lord uttered the very parable before us on one occasion, expressly with a view to guard us against the influence of false teachers and false brethren^e—But it is of our own hearts that we are principally called to judge; and assuredly

The man whose life is good may know his heart also to be good

[If "every tree is known by its own fruit," (and no man hesitates to call a vine, or a bramble, by its proper name when he sees the fruit) we need be in no fear of concluding that our hearts are good, when our dispositions and actions accord with the word of God—No man indeed is *perfectly* good, because we still carry about with us a "body of sin and death:" but he, who discovers the renovation of his heart by the holiness of his life, is certainly possessed of a "good treasure," and may justly be called "a good man"—]

The man also whose life is evil may conclude with equal certainty that his heart is evil

[Many, when they cannot deny the sinfulness of their
conduct,

^d 1 John iii. 9.

^e Matt. vii. 15, 16.

conduct, will yet affirm that their hearts are good—But what is this but to affirm, in spite of the most indubitable evidence to the contrary, that a bramble is a vine or fig-tree?—Let any man put the question to his own conscience, Can a man, who lives in a neglect of God and his own soul, have a *good* heart?—Can the proud, the passionate, the revengeful, the lewd, the intemperate, the covetous, have *good* hearts?—Then may a bramble be a fig-tree, notwithstanding it never bears any thing but thorns and briers—]

ADDRESS

1. Those whose fruits are evil

[It is not the openly profane, or the grossly sensual alone, but all, who are not really bringing forth the fruits of righteousness and true holiness, that we now address—And what must we say? Shall we flatter you? we dare not: the scripture speaks plainly; and it would be at the peril of our souls to conceal the truth: St. John expressly calls you children of the devil^f; and our Lord declares that everlasting fire must be your portion^g—Shall it seem unreasonable that such should be the doom of the ungodly, while the righteous are admitted into heaven? Are you at a loss to assign a reason why so great a difference should be put between persons, who, to outward appearance, do not differ very widely from each other?—I know that, if you trace the stream to its source, and examine their hearts, there will be found as great a difference between them, as between the portions that they shall hereafter receive—The one has nothing but a treasure of evil principles and evil affections within him; the other is a “partaker of the divine nature,” and is “transformed into the very image of his God”—Seek then to have “a new heart and a right spirit renewed within you”—“YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN;” and that too for this plain reason, because what you have by nature is altogether carnal; and you must receive a spiritual nature to qualify you for the enjoyment of a spiritual kingdom^h—Ye must become “new creatures:” “instead of the thorn must come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier must come up the myrtle-tree,” if ever you would be monuments of God’s saving mercyⁱ—]

2. Those whose fruits are good

[Doubtless you wish to have your evidences of conversion more and more clear—With this view it will be well to mark all your words and actions, and to trace them to their motives and principles—But do not forget that though your own works are the *evidences of your conversion*, they are not the *grounds of your acceptance with God*—It is Christ’s obedience unto

^f 1 John iii. 8, 10.

^h John iii. 6.

^g Matt. vii. 19. and xii. 35—37.

ⁱ Isai. lv. 13.

unto death that must be the one foundation of your hope—However holy your life be, your eyes must never be turned from Christ—He is your only, and your all-sufficient Saviour—In him you are to hope, as well when your evidences are obscured, as when they are bright—Nevertheless you should endeavour to abound more and more in all the fruits of righteousness, that you may have the comfort of an assured hope, and God may be glorified in your deportment—]

CCXXVI. THE WISE BUILDER.

Luke vi. 47—49. *Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like. He is like a man who built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth, against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*

IT is of great importance in preaching the gospel, to discriminate between the different characters to whom we deliver our message, and to separate the precious from the vile. If this be neglected, the wicked will hold fast their delusions, and the righteous continue in bondage to their fears: but if we be faithful in the discharge of this part of our duty, those among whom we minister, will be led to a knowledge of their own proper character and condition. Our blessed Lord, at the conclusion of his Sermon on the mount, shews us how we should apply our subjects to the hearts and consciences of our hearers. In the words before us he describes

I. The character and condition of the godly

Their character is drawn in simple but comprehensive terms

["They come to Christ:" this is absolutely necessary to their entrance on the divine life: till they have come to Christ under a sense of their own guilt and helplessness, they have no pretensions to godliness; they are obnoxious to the curse of the law, and the wrath of God^a.

After

^a John iii. 18. 36. and v. 40.

After they have come to Christ, "they hear his sayings;" they sit at his feet, like Mary^b, desiring to be fully instructed in his mind and will. With this view they study the holy scriptures, and "meditate in them day and night:" with this view also they attend the ordinances, and "receive the word, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God^c."

They do not, however, rest in hearing his sayings; but they go forth to "do them." They desire to know his will *in order that they may do it*. They love the most searching discourses, because by them they discover the evil of their own hearts, and are led to aspire after a fuller conformity to the divine image: nor would they rest, till they feel every "thought and desire captivated to the obedience of Christ."]

Their condition is exhibited in an apt similitude

[A man who builds his house upon a rock, shews that, however temperate the weather may be at the time he is building, he expects tempests to arise: and when the storms do come, he feels himself secure, from a consciousness that his house is so constructed as to withstand their violence.

Now a godly man resembles him *in foresight*, and *in security*. He knows that, though he may at present be able to live in some tolerable comfort without religion, it will not be always so: he feels that, when misfortunes, troubles, sickness, and death shall come, he will be miserable without a well-founded hope of immortality. Hence he will not be satisfied with any religion that will not stand the test of scriptural examination; for he knows that no other will prove sufficient in the hour of trial.

When the storms blow, and the tempests beat upon him, then he finds the benefit of having "dugged deep," and laid his foundation well. Then he stands immoveably secure: the promise and oath of Jehovah are his firm support: Omnipotence itself upholds him. In vain do troubles from without, or temptations from within, assault him: even in the immediate prospect of death itself he retains his confidence, "knowing in whom he has believed^d," and assured that Jesus will save him to the uttermost.]

In a perfect contrast to this, our Lord exhibits

II. The character and condition of the ungodly

Their character is the very reverse of that already drawn

[It is worthy of observation, that *nothing is said of their coming unto Christ*. Here is their radical defect: had they ever come as perishing sinners to him, they should have wanted

^b Luke x. 39. ^c 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^d 2 Tim. i. 12, and iv. 6—8.

wanted nothing for the perfecting of their salvation : but they are too proud to stoop to such an humiliating method of obtaining mercy : they do not feel their desert of God's wrath, or their need of a mediator : and therefore, though they will compliment Jesus with the name of Saviour, they will not flee to him for refuge as those who know, that without him they must for ever perish.

They will indeed "hear his sayings ; but they will not do them." They may take a pleasure in hearing the gospel preached ; and, like Ezekiel's hearers, attend the ministration of the word with as much delight, as others listen to a musical performance^e. They may even shew an extraordinary zeal about the ordinances of religion^f, and may alter their conduct, like Herod, in many things^g : but there is some darling lust with which they will not part. When their besetting sin comes to be exposed, they draw back, unwilling to have their wounds probed, and their lusts mortified. When they are required to "pluck out their right eye, and to cut off their right hand," they turn away, exclaiming, "This is an hard saying ; who can hear it^h ?"

This stamps their character as ungodly. It is not the commission of any gross sin that constitutes men ungodly ; but it is the retaining of some bosom lust, the rendering of only a partial obedience to the law, the "not having the heart right with God."]

The similitude also reversed exactly describes their condition

[A person who, because the weather is fair, builds his house without any proper foundation, will, as soon as storms and tempests arise, find reason for regret. The house, for want of a foundation, will be undermined, and fall. He will then lose all the labour and money that he has bestowed upon it, and perhaps, with all his family, be overwhelmed in its ruins.

The ungodly man "is like to him" *in folly, and in danger*. His religion must come to the test at last : if it bear him through his trials in life, and uphold him with some degree of comfort in death, still it can never bear the scrutiny of the judgment day : then every man's work will be tried as by fire ; and that which does not endure the fire will be burnt upⁱ. How will the folly of trusting to vain delusions appear in that day ! What regret and sorrow will arise in the mind of him who has laboured so much for nought ! And how "great will be his ruin," when he shall have no shelter from the wrath of God, and when the goodly fabric that he built shall crush him to atoms !

O that

^e Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^f Isai. lviii. 2.

^g Mark vi. 20.

^h John vi. 60.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 13.

O that we well considered this; and that all of us would build as for eternity !]

Let us LEARN from hence

1. The necessity of practical religion

[Religion does not consist in mere notions, however just or scriptural; but in a conformity of heart and life to the will of God. We must not, however, mistake, as though our works were the foundation whereon we are to build (*that would indeed be a foundation of sand*;) Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope^k; the only rock on which we must build: but then we must shew that we do build on him, by the superstructure which we raise upon him: and if the superstructure be not such as to prove that we are founded on him, our hopes of standing in the day of judgment are vain and delusive.]

2. The excellence of practical religion

[A house, whose foundation is deep, and fixed upon a rock, will stand, whatever storms or tempests may beat upon it. And thus it is with the practical and consistent Christian. His principles will bear him up in the day of adversity: he may defy all the hosts both of men and devils; for none shall ever separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord^l. And when the most specious structures shall fall, to the confusion and ruin of those who erected them, the wise builder shall dwell secure amidst the desolating judgments and the wreck of worlds.]

^k 1 Cor. iii. 11.

^l Rom. viii. 38, 39.

CCXXVII. THE PERVERSE CHILDREN.

Luke vii. 31, 32, 35. *And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

THOUGH man is distinguished from all other animals by the faculty of reason, he is far from submitting readily to its dictates—In things that are agreeable to his mind he is easily persuaded: but where he is at all swayed by

prejudice, or passion, or interest, he cannot be prevailed upon even by the clearest arguments to embrace truth, or to fulfil his duty—Thus it was with the Pharisees in our Lord's time—On which account he compared them to perverse children, who could not be induced by their companions to participate in their amusements, notwithstanding every endeavour on their parts to accommodate themselves to their wishes *—

In this parable our Lord intimates

I. The reception which his gospel meets with

God has used a great variety of means in order to recommend his gospel

[He published it to the Jews under types and shadows—And gradually unfolded it to them in a long series of prophecies—When the time came for its more general promulgation, he sent the Baptist to prepare their minds, and the Messiah himself to preach it to them, and to confirm his word by miracles without number—He endued also a few poor fishermen with miraculous powers, and sent them to publish the glad tidings, that their divine mission being unquestionable, their testimony might be universally received—Nothing was wanting that could in any wise promote the acceptance of the truth—]

But in every place the gospel has been rejected by those to whom it has come

[The Jews rested in the letter of their law, but hated the spirit of it; they embraced the shadow, but rejected the substance—By whomsoever the gospel was preached, or under whatsoever form, the great majority of that nation could not be prevailed upon to receive it—Thus at this day, the truth of God is generally disregarded and despised—Men, it is true, profess to be followers of Christ, and to approve of his religion—But they are not suitably affected with it in any respect; they neither rejoice in its promises, nor are humbled by its threatenings; “if we pipe to them, they will not dance; and if we mourn to them, they will not lament”—Notwithstanding there is such a transcendent excellence in the gospel, and such an exact suitableness to men's necessities, yet we still have reason to complain, “Lord, who hath believed our report?”]

It

* It was customary to use pipes both at marriages and at funerals; at the one in cheerful, at the other in plaintive, strains. And the children, in their play, are supposed to represent first the festivity of a marriage, and afterwards the lamentations of a funeral: in neither of which could they get their companions to join them.

It is a matter of no small importance to ascertain

II. The true ground of this reception

The *ostensible* ground is, that the gospel is not properly administered

[The Jews could not confute the arguments of the Baptist or of Christ—But they took occasion from the peculiarities of each to reject their testimony—John, agreeably to the dispensation under which he ministered, was austere in his manners; and Christ, agreeably to the dispensation which he came to introduce, was affable and social: yet, so far were the people from being pleased with either, that of one they said, “He hath a devil;” and of the other, “He is a glutton and a drunkard.”]

Thus it is at this time: men will not say, “I hate the gospel, and therefore will not attend to it;” but they will find fault with the persons who administer it; and make their peculiarities a plea for despising their message. At one time they represent the ministers of Christ as speaking too much about faith, and thereby depreciating morality: at another time, as insisting so strongly on good works, that they drive men to despair—Sometimes they will object to the truth because it is not read to them from a written discourse: and sometimes because of the earnest and impressive manner in which it is delivered—Even the virtues whereby ministers endeavour to adorn and recommend the gospel, are often made occasions of offence; and the strictness of their lives, the condescension of their manners, and their assiduity in labours, are stated as grounds of heavy complaint—And as no terms were too opprobrious to be applied to the Baptist and to Christ, so there is no name so ignominious, nor any treatment so harsh, but it is thought a proper portion for every faithful servant of the Lord—]

The *true* ground, however, must be found in the perverseness of mankind

[We, at this distance of time, see clearly enough the perverseness of the Jews in their treatment of Christ and his apostles—But we are not aware of the same principle operating in ourselves—Nevertheless the truth is, that we have imbibed notions, which we do not like to have controverted; and have adopted practices, from which we will not recede—The gospel proposes humiliating doctrines which we are too proud to receive; and self-denying rules of conduct which we cannot endure to follow—Hence we must either acknowledge that we ourselves are wrong, or find some reason for rejecting the truth—But we cannot altogether profess ourselves infidels and despise the gospel as a fable; we therefore are constrained to blame the mode in which it is administered, and to condemn

condemn the preachers of it in order to justify ourselves—But the real ground of our conduct is, that “we love darkness rather than light”—And, if Jesus Christ himself were again to preach to us, the same conduct which he formerly pursued would give the same offence to his hearers, and be made a pretext for rejecting his testimony—]

But in the close of the parable, our Lord suggests

III. The encouragement which ministers, notwithstanding this reception, have to preach the gospel

The gospel of Christ, when justly stated, is the truest “wisdom”

[It is called by St. Paul “The wisdom of God in a mystery:” and the wisdom of God does indeed beam forth in every part of it, whether we consider the mysteries it reveals, or the mode of its administration—Who can contemplate the method prescribed by God for effecting our reconciliation with him, or for fitting us to enjoy his presence, and not be filled with rapture and amazement?—The more we consider the satisfaction of Christ, or the agency of the Spirit, the nature of faith or the beauty of holiness, or, in a word, the union of God’s glory and man’s happiness in the whole scheme of redemption, the more shall we be overwhelmed with wonder at the depths of wisdom contained in it—

The progressive steps also by which it has been dispensed, together with the means by which it has been confirmed and propagated, yea, even the manner in which it has been brought home with power to our own hearts and consciences, will furnish abundant matter to increase our admiration—

And must not the consideration of this be a rich encouragement to ministers under all the contempt and obloquy with which they and their ministrations are regarded?—Yes, they know that what the world account foolishness is indeed the wisdom of God^b; and that “if they be beside themselves, it is to God^c”—]

Moreover, the children of wisdom, will assuredly receive their testimony

[They are “the children of wisdom” who are willing to “sit at wisdom’s gates,” and to obey her dictates—And, such are to be found in every place, notwithstanding the generality prefer the ways of sin and folly—Now “of all these” the gospel will be approved, embraced, “justified”—They will shew to the world, both by their profession and conduct, that it is indeed “worthy of all acceptation”—While others pour contempt upon it, these will be nourished by it; and while others
make

^b 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

^c 1 Cor. iv. 10. and 2 Cor. v. 13.

make it a stumbling-block, over which they fall and perish, these will be rendered by it "wise unto salvation"—

What can a faithful minister wish for more? He knows that his labours shall not be altogether in vain, but that there shall be some who shall be saved by his means, and be "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for evermore—And this far outweighs all the injuries and insults, which in the discharge of his office, he meets with at the hands of a perverse ungrateful world—]

TO IMPROVE this subject, observe

1. What enemies are men to their own happiness!

[What end had the Baptist or Christ in view, when they preached to the people? Was it to raise a party? to get a name? to gratify their own vanity?—Was it not rather to instruct and save mankind?—Yet, men every where set themselves against them—And of what concern was it to John or Christ that they were called by opprobrious names?—But to those who thus despised them it was of infinite moment; because they thereby insured and aggravated their eternal condemnation—Thus it is of small concern to us to be loaded with ignominy and reproach: but to those who thus requite our labours, it is an awful matter; for they despise their own mercies, and accomplish their own ruin—Let those who are thus disposed, remember, that they are far greater enemies to themselves than they are to us—]

2. What a blessing is "an honest and good heart!"

[They alone who possess this gift can profit from the gospel—With such a disposition men will overlook the little peculiarities which there may be in those who minister the word, and will endeavour to derive benefit from the word they hear—They will consider that every minister has his proper gift; and that the method which they disapprove, may be well suited to others—They will be thankful that the glad tidings are sent to them; and will receive the word with the affections suited to it^d—They will either "dance or weep" according as the subject calls for humiliation or joy—Thus, instead of rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, they will "justify God^e" by an unfeigned acknowledgement of his truth, and a ready compliance with his will—

Let us then cultivate this disposition—So shall that which is to many "a savour of death unto death, be to us a savour of life unto life^f"—]

^d Acts xvii. 11,

^e Ver. 29, 30,

^f 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

CCXXVIII. THE INSOLVENT DEBTORS.

Luke vii. 40—42. *And Jesus answering, said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.*

PARABLES are well calculated to convey reproof in the most convincing, and at the same time in the least offensive, manner—

Nothing could exceed the beauty and efficacy of Nathan's parable to David—

That also in the text was admirably adapted to the occasion ^a—

I. The parable itself

It presents to our view three important truths

1. We all, though in different degrees, are debtors unto God

[There is not a man on earth who has not violated the law of God—

But though all are guilty in his sight, some are far more so than others ^b—

The profane and profligate sinner is doubtless worse than the more decent moralist—

We must not, however, compare ourselves with others ^c, but try ourselves by the standard of God's law—

And if we bring ourselves to this test, we shall find no cause for boasting, even though we may have been preserved from gross offences—]

2. No man, however little he may owe, can discharge his own debt

[If we could obey the law perfectly in future, our obedience would no more compensate for our past disobedience, than our ceasing to increase a debt would discharge a debt we had already contracted—

But we cannot fulfil all that is required of us, or indeed perform any one action that is absolutely free from all imperfection—

How then shall we discharge our debt, when, with all our care, we cannot but daily increase it?—

Nor

^a Here the occasion should be briefly stated.

^b See the text.

^c 2 Cor. x. 12.

Nor will repentance obliterate our offences against God's law, any more than it will those committed against human laws—

If therefore neither obedience nor repentance can cancel our debt, we must confess that “we have nothing to pay”—]

3. But God is willing freely to forgive us all

[There is no such difference between one and another as can *entitle* any one to a preference in God's esteem, or procure him a readier acceptance with God—

Every one who truly repents and believes in Christ ^d, shall surely obtain mercy—

No recompence or composition is required to be offered by us ^e—

On the contrary, an attempt to offer any to God would absolutely preclude us from all hope of favour ^f—

None can be accepted who will not come as bankrupts; nor shall any who come in this manner, be rejected ^g—]

Such being the import of the parable, we proceed to

II. The improvement that is to be made of it

Our Lord evidently intended to reprove Simon, while he vindicated both the woman's conduct and his own. Hence it seems proper to improve the parable

1. For the conviction of self-righteous Pharisees

[Persons who think their debts small, feel little love to the Saviour themselves, and are ready to censure those who do love him—

While they approve of zeal in every thing else, they condemn it in religion—

But this disposition shews that their seeming piety is mere hypocrisy—

If they had any true grace, they would delight to see Christ honoured, and to honour him themselves—]

2. For the vindication of zealous Christians

[We would not plead for a zeal that is without knowledge—

But such a zeal as this grateful penitent discovered, must be vindicated, though the whole world should condemn it—

Are

^d The parable was not intended to set forth the doctrines of redemption, but merely the effect which a sense of great obligations will produce. And, if we would infer that we have no need of faith in the atonement, because the parable makes no mention of it, we must infer also that we may be forgiven without repentance, since there is no mention made of that.

^e Isai. lv. 1.

^f Gal. v. 4.

^g Isai. i. 18. and lv. 7.

Are there any then who weep at the Saviour's feet, and who seek by all means in their power to honour him? Let them go on boldly, yet modestly, fearing neither loss nor shame in so good a cause—

And let them know, that HE, for whom they suffer, will soon testify his approbation of them before the assembled universe—]

3. For the encouragement of all penitent sinners

[Our Lord, both in the parable, and in his address to the woman, shewed that no sinner, however vile, should be spurned from his feet—

He even declared to her accusers, and revealed to her own soul, that he had pardoned her sins—

Henceforth then let no man despair of obtaining mercy at his hands—

Only let us acknowledge to him our inability to pay our own debt—

And he will say to us, as to the woman, “ Depart in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee”—]

CCXXIX. THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

Luke xi. 21, 22. *When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

THE miracles wrought by our Lord were too manifest to be denied even by his most inveterate enemies—Some however endeavoured to evade the force of them by ascribing them to a confederacy with Satan—Our Lord shewed them the absurdity of such an idea—The expelling of evil spirits was a confirmation of our Lord's doctrine—Consequently it tended to the destruction of Satan's kingdom, and the establishment of his own—*This* Satan could not but be aware of—He would therefore never concur in an act which must terminate in his own ruin—Hence it appeared that the power, which Jesus exercised over the evil spirits, was not only without the concurrence of Beelzebub, but in spite of his utmost exertions to withstand it—To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us—

Extreme caution should be used in explaining the parables, that we may not refine upon them too much, or give to any part a sense which it was not designed to bear—But some parables were certainly intended to be minutely applied in all their parts^a—That which is now before us seems to be of that number—We shall therefore open it in a way of familiar exposition—

Satan is fitly compared to a strong man armed

[The strength and power of Satan are frequently mentioned in the holy scriptures—His very names, *Apollyon*^b, *the great Dragon*^c, and *the God of this world*^d, evidently characterize him as possessed of exceeding great power—As an angel, he excelled in strength^e—Nor, though he has lost his original purity, has his native energy been at all impaired—He is rendered more formidable too by “his armour”—Alas! what fiery darts has he in his quiver^f!—With what inconceivable subtlety does he plan his seasons and methods of assault^g!—Nor can he have so long engaged in this warfare, without having learned much by experience—]

The hearts of unregenerate men are “his palace”

[He has the most intimate access to the hearts of men—He entered into the heart of Judas, and prompted him to betray his Lord^h—By the same invisible agency he urged Ananias and Sapphira to lie unto the Holy Ghostⁱ—In the same manner he stimulates all his vassals to the commission of sin—He rules within them as a monarch^k—And lords it over them with most despotic sway^l—Every apartment of the palace is occupied by his attendants—The understanding, the will, the affections, the memory, the conscience, are all under his controul—If seven spirits only possess some, Legion is the name of others^m—]

While he takes up his abode in them, he keeps all in peace

[One would think that a soul possessed by him should be filled with horror—But he contrives to divert the thoughts of men from all their spiritual concerns—He blinds their minds so that they cannot see their real state—He fills them with a presumptuous confidence that they shall do well at lastⁿ—Perhaps he makes them laugh at the idea of satanic influence—

He

^a Matt. xiii. 18—23. and 36—40.

^b Rev. ix. 11.

^c Rev. xii. 7.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^e Ps. ciii. 20.

^f Eph. vi. 16.

^g 2 Cor. xi. 3. Eph. vi. 11.

^h John xiii. 27.

ⁱ Acts v. 3.

^k Eph. ii. 2.

^l 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^m Luke xi. 26. with viii. 30.

ⁿ Comp. 1 Kings xxii. 22. with Jer. vi. 14.

He suggests that God is too merciful to inflict eternal punishment—And that all apprehensions of divine wrath are the effects of superstition or enthusiasm—If at any time they are impressed by the word of God, he catches it away, lest they should believe it and be saved^o—Thus he continually deceives his vassals, and lulls them asleep in a most fatal security—]

There is One however, even Jesus, who is stronger than he

[Satan indeed is a roaring lion; but Jesus is the all-powerful lion of the tribe of Judah^p—Satan is the serpent that bruised the heel of Jesus; but Jesus is the woman's seed that effectually bruised his head^q—Jesus vanquished him in repeated combats^r—And at last triumphed over him upon the cross^s—Yea, and led him captive in his resurrection and ascension^t—Nor does he exercise less power *in* his people than he then did *for* them^u—His grace is sufficient to fortify us against the fiercest assaults of Satan^x—Nor shall the weakness of his people counteract or retard his career of victory^y—]

Nor can Satan any longer retain his hold when Jesus comes to eject him

[Satan strove indeed to the utmost to keep possession of the bodies of men—Nor relinquished them at last without the most strenuous efforts to destroy them^z—Thus will he maintain a conflict with Jesus in their souls—If he be driven from the outworks, he will defend himself in the citadel—Sometimes he may appear for a season to defy omnipotence itself—But in due season he is invariably overcome—His strong holds, one after another, are demolished^a—And he is constrained to surrender the palace which he can no longer keep—]

Jesus having driven him from the soul, will turn all its powers against him

[A sinner, while under Satan's dominion, has many things which prove serviceable to that wicked fiend—His wisdom, riches, influence, are all pressed into the service of the devil—All are used to strengthen his power, and to undermine the authority of Christ—But when Jesus has gained possession of a soul, he instantly secures all its powers—And turns the artillery of Satan against himself—Whatever wealth or influence the man possessed, is now made subservient to the Redeemer's interests—The gold of Egypt is formed into vessels for the sanctuary of the Lord—And every talent is improved in

^o Luke viii. 12.

^p Rev. v. 5.

^q Gen. iii. 15.

^r Matt. iv. 10. John xiv. 30. and xvi. 11.

^s Col. ii. 15.

^t Eph. iv. 8.

^u 1 John iv. 4.

^x 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.

^y Rev. vi. 2.

^z Mark ix. 20, 26.

^a 2 Cor. x. 5.

in promoting and establishing his kingdom^b—Thus does Jesus drive Satan from his fortress^c—And enable the once captive soul to trample on him as a vanquished enemy^d—]

From the parable thus explained we may learn

1. What true conversion is

[Conversion does not consist merely in a change of sentiment—It supposes that our false peace has been broken—And that Satan has been made to yield to the victorious grace of Jesus—Jesus himself too is now become the sole monarch of our hearts—And we are cordially serving him with all our power—Let us try ourselves by this touchstone—Let us see whether we be indeed new creatures—Nor let us rest till we be turned from the power of Satan unto God^e—]

2. Whence it is that any are converted

[Men are in themselves the willing slaves of Satan—So far from desiring deliverance from him, they fight against their deliverer—Most assuredly therefore they are not the authors of their own conversion—It is Jesus alone who chooses the objects of his favour—It is he alone who begins and carries on the good work within them^f—To him therefore must every redeemed soul ascribe the glory^g—*None can boast* as if they had effected any thing by their own power^h—*Nor need any despair* as though their bonds could never be broken—To every one, who wishes to be made free, there is abundant encouragement in the scripturesⁱ—May our eyes be so directed to Jesus that his power may be magnified in our deliverance^k!—]

3. What is the duty of those who are converted

[As Satan never leaves a soul without reluctance, so does he ever watch for an opportunity to return to it—Nor will he fail of accomplishing his purpose, if our hearts be not guarded by the Lord Jesus—Let none then be satisfied with purging out only some grosser sins^l—In vain will the house be swept and garnished, if it be not occupied by the divine inhabitant—Satan will return with seven devils worse than himself—And the last state of such men will be worse than the first^m—Let all then be on their guard—And commit the keeping of their souls to Jesusⁿ—Then shall all the attempts of their enemy be baffled—He who never slumbers will surely preserve them^o—And they shall be made the habitation of God to all eternity^p—What we say therefore to one, we say unto all, WATCH^q—]

^b 2 Cor. x. 6.

^c Acts xxvi. 18.

^d 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^e 2 Pet. i. 9.

^f Ps. cxxi. 4—7.

^g 1 John v. 18.

^h Zech. iv. 9. Heb. xii. 2.

ⁱ Isai. xlix. 24, 25.

^j Luke xi. 25, 26.

^k Eph. ii. 22.

^l Rom. xvi. 20.

^m Zech. iv. 7.

ⁿ Isai. xlv. 22.

^o 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^p Mark xiii. 37.

CCXXX. THE RELAPSED DÆMONIAC.

Matt. xii. 43—45. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

THOUGH the general scope of the parables is, for the most part, plain and obvious, it is often difficult to see the precise meaning of some circumstances contained in them—

This is the case with the parable before us; the minuter incidents of which may be considered perhaps rather as ornamental, than as essential parts of the parable itself^a—

Its import, on the whole, suggests the following observations

I. Persons, once delivered from Satan, are again open to his assaults

Satan certainly has power over the hearts of men

[There is much ascribed to his agency in the holy scriptures—

He is said to blind the eyes of unbelievers^b, and to rule in their hearts^c—

Though he has not the same power over men's bodies as he once had, he evidently possesses their souls, and drives them to perdition^d—]

But

^a Our Lord had cast out a devil; and this was by the Pharisees imputed to a confederacy with Beelzebub. After shewing the absurdity of such a notion, he contrasted their state with that of the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba; and compared them to a relapsed dæmoniac, who would be in a worse state than if Satan had never gone out of him at all. If we proceed to explain all that is spoken respecting the unclean spirit, we must interpret it of Satan, ejected from the Jews, and going in *dry*, that is, unfrequented places, or places *not watered by the gospel*, to find rest among the Gentiles; and, upon being pursued thither by the preaching of the apostles, returning to take more full possession of the Jews than ever; since, however reformed some of them might be, they were, as a nation, perfectly prepared, through their inveterate lusts and prejudices, to receive him.

^b 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^c Eph. ii. 2.

^d Mark ix. 22.

But he often loses his dominion through the preaching of the gospel

[Paul was commissioned to turn men from the power of Satan unto God^e—

And the gospel was the weapon whereby he rescued them from his dominion^f—

The same divine energy also attends it, when used by us^g—

Though conversions are more rare than in the apostles' days, they are not less real—]

Yet they who have been delivered from him, are still open to his assaults

[How often did he repeat his attacks on Peter^h!—

With what envious malice did he buffet Paulⁱ!—

How did he renew his attempts even on Christ himself^k!—

Thus he still watches for his opportunity to destroy us^l—

Nor shall we be wholly out of his reach, till we are finally discharged from our warfare^m—]

We had need therefore to watch against this subtle enemy; for

II. If we be a second time subjected to Satan's dominion, our last state will be worse than the first

It is certain that Satan can never finally prevail against the elect

[This is evidently implied in the character which is given of themⁿ—

The promises of God also insure to them the victory over him^o—

Hence they are taught to defy all the powers of darkness^p—]

They, into whom he may return, are described in the text

[The true children of God desire to be ever "filled with the Spirit"—

Nor will they suffer the things that please Satan to abide quietly in their hearts—

But self-deceivers are satisfied, like Herod, with a partial change^q—

And continue with their old affections and lusts unmortified^r—

Judas,

^e Acts xxvi. 18.

^f 2 Cor. x. 4.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.

^h Matt. xvi. 23. Luke xxii. 31.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^k Compare Luke iv. 13. John xiv. 30. Luke xxii. 53.

^l 1 Pet. v. 8.

^m Eph. vi. 11, 12.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 13, 14.

^o Rom. xvi. 20.

^p Rom. viii. 38, 39.

and v. 18.

^q Mark vi. 20.

^r Ps. lxxviii. 36, 37.

Judas, Ananias, Demas, no doubt retained their love of this world—

Hence Satan found their hearts “swept” indeed, and “emptied” of gross sin, but still *furnished* for his reception—

And, wherever this is the case, he will surely, however expelled for a season, return ere long with increased power—]

On his return to them their state will be worse than ever

[The Holy Spirit will be grieved, provoked, quenched^s—

Their consciences will be silenced, and made callous^t—

Their evil habits will return, and gain an irresistible dominion—

They will live only to treasure up wrath against the day of wrath—

And the deliverance, which they have neglected to improve, will fearfully aggravate their final condemnation^u—]

ENQUIRE

1 Have we ever yet been delivered from Satan?

[Perhaps many doubt whether they have ever been possessed by Satan—

But this alone is sufficient to prove, that they are yet under his dominion—

That usurper reigns in all till he is vanquished and expelled by Jesus Christ—

And it is only in answer to fervent prayer, that the adorable Saviour puts forth his power to drive him out—]

2. Are we yet daily maintaining a strict watch against him?

[If he has been cast out of us, he is seeking his opportunity to return—

Nor can he be kept away, but by constant prayer and watchfulness—

Let us then guard every avenue of our hearts—

Let us implore the aid of our divine inhabitant—

The exertion of our own power in dependence on the intercession and grace of Christ, will insure us a successful issue of the conflict^x—]

^s Eph. iv. 30. Isai. lxiii. 10. ^t 1 Thess. v. 19. ^u 1 Tim. iv. 2.

^x 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. ^x Jam. iv. 7. with Luke xxii. 31, 32.

CCXXXI. THE SINGLE EYE.

Luke xi. 35. *Take heed therefore, that the light that is in thee be not darkness.*

REASON is certainly the richest endowment of the human mind—When regulated by the word and Spirit of God,

God, it will direct our paths, and enable us to guard against every dangerous or important error—But it is capable of being so warped by specious reasonings, and selfish considerations, as to become an engine of Satan, and an instrument of our more aggravated ruin—There is nothing, however unreasonable, which a perverse spirit will not do; nor any thing, however criminal, which it will not justify—The whole conduct of our Lord's enemies evinced this melancholy truth—He had confirmed his divine mission with innumerable and most stupendous miracles, and yet the incredulous Jews were always asking, What sign shewest thou?—This gave occasion to (what we may call) the parable of the single eye; in which our Lord shewed the necessity of acting with a simple and pure intention; and from which he suggested the most impressive caution before us—We shall inquire into

I. The import of this caution

By “the light within us” we may understand reason or conscience—And it may be said to become “darkness”

1. When, though it does shine, we will not follow its direction

[The eye, supposing it to be free from any defects, is capable of directing all the motions of the body—So reason or conscience, if freed from all undue bias, will serve in a great measure to regulate the active powers of the soul^a—But as a person who should keep his eyes shut in order that he might not behold the light, would be in the same predicament with one who was really blind; so the person, who either will not bring his reason and conscience to the light of God's word, or obstinately determines to persist in the paths of error, is, in effect at least, as much in darkness, as if he did not possess any such faculties—]

2. When it is obscured by any defect in the organs of vision

[As vicious humours will destroy the sight of our bodily eyes, so will sinful affections impair the powers of the mind—Prejudice, passion, or interest, will often blind us to such a degree, that we cannot discern the things that are most obvious to others—We all are sensible of this weakness in others; and it would be well if we were more on our guard respecting it in ourselves—Not to mention the innumerable instances which

^a Prov. xx. 27.

which manifest themselves in our conduct towards each other, how universally are men blinded in their conduct towards God!—While Christianity *in general* is allowed to be both good and necessary, there is scarcely any regard paid to its *particular*, and most distinguishing tenets—Its fundamental doctrines, such as original sin, justification by faith, regeneration by the holy Spirit, are discarded as erroneous; and its most essential precepts of holiness and self-denial are ridiculed as preciseness and enthusiasm—Where the jaundiced eye receives such an impression respecting the most important truths, its light must be considered as no better than darkness—]

3. When, under a professed regard to it, we do what is in itself evil

[It is no uncommon thing to put “evil for good, and darkness for light,” and to engage earnestly in some evil conduct under the idea that we are doing what is right ^b—Our Lord has taught us to expect that men would persecute and even “kill his faithful followers, and imagine all the time that they were doing God service”—And Paul, in the midst of all his boasted morality, persecuted the Christians even unto death, and persuaded himself that he “ought to do” so ^c—A similar conduct yet obtains in the world—There are thousands who yet think it their duty to oppose the progress of the gospel, and to repress by every means in their power its influence over their friends and relatives—The light of such persons surely is, not only dark, but darkness itself—]

It appears then that *the caution is, not to neglect or violate the dictates of our conscience*—To impress it the more deeply on our minds, we shall consider

II. The reason of it

The Jews had manifested a most astonishing perverseness in resisting all the evidences of our Lord’s mission—And he well knew how fatal it would prove to them, if they should persist in it any longer—Hence he gave them this solemn caution, which may for similar reasons be given also unto us

1. The evil, against which we are guarded, is a common evil

[Though there is much ignorance in the world, yet there are few, if any, whose practice does not fall very far short of what they know to be their duty—There certainly are different degrees of light in the minds of unconverted men; but all in some measure “resist the truth,” and “imprison it in unrighteousness”

^b Isai. v. 20.

^c John xvi. 2. Acts xxvi. 9.

unrighteousness^d—When therefore this evil is so general, should we not be on our guard against it?—When all of us see how much it prevails in others, should we not suspect its influence over ourselves?—Let every one tremble for his own house, when he sees it standing in the midst of a general conflagration—]

2. It is an evil to which we are prone

[The heart is justly said to be “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”—It is ready and ingenious in colouring over its own devices, and in justifying whatever tends to its own satisfaction—The world also presents to us ten thousand pleas that serve to confirm our delusions—And Satan, who beguiled our first parents in Paradise, doubtless lends his aid to lead us astray, and to keep us ignorant of our real state—Who is there amongst us that has not experienced this proneness to self-deception—The very apostles on some occasions “knew not what spirit they were of”—And who has not repeatedly found, that the things, which seemed right in his eyes at one time, have, in an hour of sober reflection, appeared to have been the extremest folly?—Surely then we never can be too watchful against the treachery of our own hearts—]

3. It is an evil that greatly aggravates our guilt

[God has given us a conscience capable of “accusing or excusing” us according to the true tenor of our actions^e—Now if we either warp it by vile affections, or silence it by continued opposition to its dictates, our sin is aggravated an hundred-fold—This is repeatedly declared both by Christ and his apostles^f—And can we suppose that our punishment also will not be proportionably enhanced?—Will not “the servant who knew his Lord’s will and did it not, be beaten with more stripes than he who transgressed through ignorance?”—Will not those, who improved a less degree of light, “rise up in judgment against” those who enjoyed more ample means of instruction, and yet neglected to improve them?—No doubt, it were “better never to have known the will of God at all, than, having known it,” to live in an allowed opposition to it—]

4. It is an evil that involves us in the greatest danger

[If we will not receive the truth in the love of it, we have reason to fear that God will give us up to our own delusions, that we may believe a lie, and receive the condemnation due to our perverseness^g—He sometimes suffers the light itself to have no other effect than to blind our eyes^h—And what a tremendous

^d Rom. i. 18. *κατεχόντων*. A heathen felt this: “Videō meliora probeque; deteriora sequor.”

^e Rom. ii. 15.

^f Jam. iv. 17. John xv. 22. and ix. 41. and iii. 19—21.

^g 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

^h Isai. vi. 9, 10.

tremendous judgment would that be!—We should only wander further and further from God, till we had “filled up the measure of our iniquities,” and be thus “treasuring up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath”—Should we ever be left to this state, “better were it for us that we had never been born”—]

Having thus explained the reasons of this caution, we shall conclude with a few words of ADVICE

1. Get your conscience truly enlightened

[It needs the illumination of God’s word and spirit—Without *that* it will be but a blind guide at best—God however has promised, for the comfort of those who seek him, that “The meek he will guide in judgment, the meek he will teach his way”—]

2. Regard the dictates of conscience in *little* things

[Conscience must exercise an uncontrolled, unlimited sway—You must “exercise yourself daily to keep it void of offence towards God and man”—If you violate its dictates in small things, you will soon cease to reverence it in greater matters—But listen to its voice on *all* occasions, and it will never suffer you to err materially—There shall always be a voice behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk ye in itⁱ”—]

3. Guard against worldly and carnal lusts

[It is astonishing to what a degree even the most sensible men, as David and Solomon, may be blinded by “foolish and hurtful lusts”—The love of money, of pleasure, or of honour, alas! how will they warp the judgment, how will they divert us from the path of duty!—Love not the world if you have any wish to possess the love of God—The two attachments are inconsistent and incompatible with each other^k—]

4. Set the Lord Jesus ever before you

[He is the light of the world; and if you will follow him, you shall never walk in darkness^l—If you can find what Christ would have done in your situation, do *that* resolutely and universally—]

ⁱ Isai. xxx. 21.

^k 1 John ii. 15.

^l John viii. 12.

CCXXXII. THE SOWER.

Matt. xiii. 18. *Hear ye the parable of the sower.*

THE word of God, by whomsoever delivered, makes a different impression on different people—

When

When our Lord himself preached, his discourses did not carry conviction to all—

Nor did his apostles find that all would receive the truths declared by them—

Thus, in this day, there is a great diversity of effect produced among the hearers of the gospel—

Our Lord foretold that this would be the case in all ages of the church—

He compared “the word of his kingdom” to seed cast into different soils—

And the fruits resulting from it, to the various produce of the different grounds—

In unfolding the parable of the sower, we shall be led to notice

I. The way-side hearers

There are two things wherein careless hearers resemble seed fallen by the way-side

They “hear the word without understanding”

[They attend upon the ordinances merely in a customary manner—

They do not go to hear with a view to obtain benefit to their souls—

Their minds are occupied about something they have seen or done—

Or are meditating some new plans of business or pleasure—

Thus, though they hear the word, they scarcely give it any attention—

Or attend merely to the style of composition and manner of delivery—

No wonder then that they obtain no solid views of divine truth—]

They lose it without regret

[“Satan” is more concerned with them than they are at all aware of—

Like “the fowls of the air,” he hovers round them to “catch away the seed”—

The word is no sooner uttered, than he turns their attention from it—

Nor is it difficult for him, by suggesting other thoughts, to accomplish his purpose—

He well knows that, if they truly “believe the word, they will be saved” by it—

And that, if they hear it with attention and candour, they cannot but believe it—

Hence

Hence he labours incessantly to divert their minds from it—

If, after all, some scattered truths remain upon the mind, they are speedily “trodden down” by the incidental occurrences of the day—]

These, it is to be feared, are by far the most numerous class of hearers—

But there are some to whom the word seems not to come in vain

II. The stony-ground hearers

These, though *equally hard as to their hearts*, differ widely from the former

They “embrace the word gladly”

[Their affections, like a thin coat of earth upon a rock, “receive the word”—

The novelty of it, and their hope of an interest in it, delights their mind—

They are moved at the sufferings of Christ, or the promises of the gospel, as they would be at any good news, or pathetic story—

“Immediately” they begin to make a profession of religion—

And seem to surpass many who have been longer instructed in the way—]

But they “renounce it again speedily”

[They never were deeply convinced of sin, nor felt their need of Christ—

They embraced the gospel, without ever seriously counting the cost—

Ere long, they find that they have to endure “persecution for the word’s sake”—

This, like “the sun” in its brightness, penetrates through the surface of their affections—

And burns up the seed, which was “never rooted” in their understanding and will—

Then they renounce their profession as speedily as they had taken it up—

And either “secretly decline” from the society to which they were attached—

Or “openly proclaim the disgust,” with which their late pretensions have inspired them—]

Nor are these the only persons who disappoint the hopes of the sower

III. The thorny-ground hearers

These are a class who more nearly resemble that of true Christians—

But

But though their profession is more specious, their end is not more happy

They maintain a religious character to the end

[They do not disregard the word like the way-side hearers—

Or cast away their profession like those of the stony-ground—

They maintain, for the most part, an uniform regard to the gospel—

They associate with the people of God in preference to all others—

They worship God in their closet and family, as well as in the public assembly—

Nor do they live in any practices which are grossly inconsistent with their character—]

But the fruit which they produce is not of a “perfect” kind

[They were never thoroughly purged from “the thorns” which were natural to the soil—

“The cares or pleasures of this world” still continue to corrode their hearts—

There is always “something which they desire” more than real holiness—

Thus the nutriment of the soil is withdrawn by noxious roots—

And the influences of the air and sun “obstructed” by surrounding branches—

Hence their fruit is never properly matured and ripened—

Their confessions want that tenderness of spirit that argues them sincere—

Their prayers, that holy importunity, which alone insures success—

Their praises, that love and fervour, which alone can make them acceptable—

The whole obedience of their lives is destitute of that divine energy, which results from the operation of God’s Spirit—]

The seed however that is sown is not wholly unproductive

IV. The good ground hearers

There is a most essential difference between these and the preceding characters—

They receive the word with humility

[All the other characters have the soil itself depraved—

But these receive the word into “honest and good hearts”—

Not that their hearts are altogether free from human depravity—

But

But they have an upright intention and desire to profit—

They neither cavil at the word, nor endeavour to pervert its meaning—

They wish to be instructed by it, and to fulfil whatever it requires—

In hearing it, they apply it as the word of GOD addressed to their souls—

And they (which is not said respecting any of the others) “understand it”—

They see its import, taste its sweetness, and embrace it as suited to their case—]

They improve it with diligence

[They are careful to “bring forth the fruits” of righteousness—

“Not” that all of them accomplish their wishes “in an equal degree”—

Splendid talents, extensive influence, or favourable occasions may enable some to distinguish themselves from others—

On the other hand, poverty and seclusion may cause the light of others to be more obscured—

Degrees of grace too, like a kindlier climate and a richer soil, make an abundant difference in degrees of fruitfulness—

Some, like St. Paul, have no delight but in adoring and serving God—

They burn with love, not towards their friends only, but their most cruel enemies—

And all their tempers, wishes, thoughts, are cast into the mould of the gospel—

Others, though less eminent, are filled with zeal in their master’s cause—

If they be not borne as on seraphs’ wings, they run eagerly as in a race—

And, though labouring under some infirmities, they bear much of their Saviour’s image—

Nor are they who are least fruitful satisfied with their attainment—

They uniformly conflict with sin, and long to be holy as God is holy—]

ADDRESS

[Let us “hear this parable,” not to judge others, but ourselves—

Let us examine to which of the foregoing classes we belong—

What has been the disposition with which we have heard the word?—

What the benefits we have received from the preached gospel?—

Have

Have we laboured to treasure up the truth of God in our hearts?—

Has it overpowered the corrupt desires which would obstruct its growth?—

And are we rising daily beyond the form, to the life and power of godliness?—

Surely neither Christ nor any faithful “sower of the word” will account his toil repaid if he see not this fruit of his labours—

Let us not then be satisfied with being “almost” and not “altogether” Christians—

If the word produce not its full effect, it will convey no benefit at all—

If it destroy not the noxious weeds, the weeds will certainly destroy it—

If it be not “a savour of life unto life, it will be of death unto death”—

Whatever profession men may make, *none but the good ground hearers will be saved at last*—

Let us now then guard against the devices of our great enemy—

Let us watch that he take not the seed out of our hearts—

Let us harrow it in, at it were, by meditation and prayer—

And, however fruitful we have been, let us labour to abound more and more^a—]

^a The observations made in this discourse being almost wholly confined to the parable itself, it may suffice to refer to that. See Matt. xiii. 3—8, 18—23. Mark iv. 3—8, 14—20. Luke viii. 4—15. The words marked with inverted commas allude particularly to the parable.

CCXXXIII. THE LIGHTED CANDLE.

Luke viii. 16—18. *No man when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid that shall not be known, and come abroad. Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.*

AMONG the antient philosophers there were some, who instilled into their more immediate followers, principles different from what they avowed to the public at large— But there was no such insincerity in our divine teacher—

He

He did indeed instruct his peculiar disciples more fully than others (for others were not capable of enduring the clear light of his gospel) but it was his design that, in due season, the whole truth should be made known to the world; and of this his intention he advertised his disciples, at the very time that he was explaining to them his public discourses.

In the parable before us he suggests the duty

I. Of those who preach the gospel

The gospel is a light in the midst of a dark world

[The world lieth in utter darkness: nor has it any means of discovering the way of acceptance with God, but by the gospel of Christ—Something of God may be learned from the visible creation: and reason may discover many things that are proper to that relation which we bear to God and to each other: but nothing can be known of Christ, nor can any means of reconciliation with God be devised by unenlightened reason—It is in the gospel only that the Saviour is exhibited, and that all the things belonging to our peace are fully revealed—Hence the word of the gospel is represented as a light shining in a dark place^a, and as that light to which the whole world must be indebted for life and salvation^b—]

It is the duty of ministers to preach this gospel

1. With fidelity

[It is not sufficient to amuse the people with moral essays, or with dissertations that shall display our own learning—We must preach Christ crucified—We must “determine to know nothing else among our people^c”—We must never omit any opportunity of setting before men that “light which God has sent into the world”—We may indeed, yea we must, use discretion in our method of dispensing the gospel, lest by an injudicious declaration of the truth we injure those whom it is our desire to benefit^d—But, in this, we must be actuated, not by worldly policy or the fear of man, but solely by a love to the souls of our fellow-creatures—When no *such* necessity imposes a restraint, we must declare the whole counsel of God^e—]

2. With perseverance

[As a man should not substitute any thing else in the place of the gospel, so neither should he withdraw from the engagements he has solemnly entered into to preach the gospel

^a 2 Pet. i. 10.

^b Isai. lx. 1—3.

^c 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^d John xvi. 12. 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 11, 14. ^e Acts xx. 20, 27.

gospel^f—Neither political ambition, nor worldly care, can ever justify a man in intermitting, much less in vacating, the paramount duties of the ministry^g—Not even sickness itself is any excuse for neglecting to employ the strength we have in the service of our God^h—We do not say, that the education of youth is incompatible with the ministry: but it should never be suffered to make void the superior obligations which we owe to God, and to the souls of men—It may be made subservient to the ministry; but must never supersede it—]

From the duty of those who preach the gospel, we pass on to consider that

II. Of those who hear it

We should “take heed how we hear it”

[We should be extremely careful *what* we hearⁱ; lest we be led astray by those, who profess to guide us into the way of peace^k—We must also be duly attentive to *the manner* in which we hear—We must not be indulging a vain curiosity, or a disposition to cavil; but must receive the word *humbly*, as the word of God himself^l; *attentively*, in order to retain it^m; and *obediently*, with a view to practise all that it enjoinsⁿ—If, like those to whom this injunction was given, we be already in the ministry, or are preparing for it, our obligations to profit by the word, whether in the church or in the closet, are greatly increased—]

An attention to this duty is of infinite importance

1. We shall invariably receive benefit in proportion as we do attend to it

[Who that has ever searched the holy scriptures in private, and waited diligently on the public ministration of the gospel, has not found that, together with increasing views of the truth, his faith, his hope, and all his graces, have been strengthened and confirmed^o?— — —]

* 2. We shall assuredly suffer loss in proportion as we neglect it

[From whatever cause we are led to slight the ordinances of religion, or to decline from the study of the sacred oracles, we shall soon find occasion for regret and sorrow—We may ask of all who have experienced such declension, Have you not lost much of the light and liberty which you once enjoyed in your souls? have not your graces languished; your corruptions

^f Lev. xxvii. 28, with Luke ix. 62. 1 Cor. ix. 16, 17.

^g 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. ^h 1 Tim. v. 23. Paul does not say, *Leave off preaching*; but, *Take care of your health.* ⁱ Mark iv. 24.

^k Prov. xix. 27.

^l 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^m Heb. ii. 1.

ⁿ Jam. i. 21, 22.

^o Acts xvii. 11, 12.

corruptions gathered strength; your difficulties increased; your comforts vanished?— — —

God has inseparably connected prosperity with diligence, and with remissness want^p—]

APPLICATION

[If the true light now shine around you, be thankful for it, and walk in the light, lest the candlestick be removed^q, and ye be left in utter darkness^r—And “let all make their light to shine before men;” that, being “as lights in the world,” they may “win by their holy conversation” those, who have resisted the light of the written word, and shut their ears against the preached gospel^s—]

^p Prov. x. 4. Matt. xxv. 28, 29.

^q Rev. ii. 5.

^r John xii. 35.

^s 1 Pet. iii. 1, 2. Phil. ii. 15, 16.

CCXXXIV. THE TARES.

Matt. xiii. 36. *His disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*

THERE is much in the holy scriptures which unenlightened reason cannot comprehend—

Hence the proud and self-sufficient continue ignorant of many truths—

But they, who seek divine teaching have more enlarged views—

God can “reveal to babes what he hides from the wise and prudent”—

Nor will he leave any in darkness who pray for his Spirit—

The apostles set us an example worthy of our imitation—

Our Lord delivered many parables which none clearly understood—

But while the Scribes and Pharisees stumbled at them, the more teachable apostles entreated their Lord to explain their import—

Both the parable of the tares and the explanation of it are contained in this chapter^a—

To

^a Ver. 24—30. and 37—43.

To elucidate it more fully, we observe, that the members of Christ's visible church resemble wheat and tares growing together

I. In their present growth

The church, like a field in which different grains are sown, contains persons of very different characters—

[Jesus sows much "good seed" in this wretched world—

Whatever use he makes of his ministers, the glory is his alone—

But "Satan" is indefatigable in "sowing bad seed" in the church—

He takes advantage of the sloth and carelessness of Christ's servants^b—

And raises up hypocrites wherever Christ raises his elect—]

These grow together to the grief of all who are truly upright

[Faithful ministers carry their complaints to their Lord and Master—

And from zeal for his honour would pluck up the tares^c—

But God will not suffer them to make this arduous attempt—

No man whatever is capable of distinguishing all characters—

Many, who have specious appearances, would be left by us as wheat—

While many, who are inwardly sincere, would be plucked up as tares—

From regard to these God commands us to forbear^d—

He suffers us indeed, and commands us, to exclude the notoriously profligate—

But he reserves to himself the office of judging the hearts of men—

Till the harvest day therefore we must expect this mixture—

Nor will it, in the issue, prove injurious to the saints—

They are now stirred up the more to watchfulness and prayer—

And hypocrites themselves have the offers of grace and mercy continued to them—]

The reproach occasioned by this will all be wiped away

II. In their future separation

The

^b Ver. 25.

^c Ver. 27.

^d Ver. 29. and Matt. xviii. 14.

The day of judgment is as the harvest

[The angels are represented by our Lord as *his* angels—
And these he will use as his reapers^e—

He will endue them with wisdom to discern the characters
of all—

And will guide them infallibly in the execution of his will—]

Then the different characters shall be separated from
each other

[The “tares” are they who “offend,” that is, by a false
profession cause others to stumble at the ways of God^f—

And they, who, making no profession, “commit iniquity”
without restraint—

All these shall be gathered first and “bound up in
bundles^g”—

Thus will they, who have been partners in sin, be made
partners in misery—

Alas! what groups of profane persons, formalists, and hypo-
crites, will then be bound together!—

May “our souls never be gathered with these;” but be
“bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God^h!”—

The “wheat” are “the righteous,” who are renewed in the
spirit of their minds—

They too shall be gathered in order to receive their por-
tion—]

What a wonderful, but awful separation will there
then be!

[Among the tares, not so much as one grain of wheat
will be found—

Nor among the righteous will there be left one ungodly
person—

The ungodly husband shall be torn from the arms of his
compassionate wife—

And the profane child from the bosom of his religious
parent—

God will shew no respect to one rather than another—

The wicked, stript of their vails, will be consigned over to
punishment—

And the righteous, freed from mutual jealousies, shall unite
in perfect harmony—]

The awfulness of this separation will be more fully
seen

III. In their eternal destiny

The

^e Ver. 39.

^g Ver. 30.

^f Ver. 41.

^h Ps. xxvi. 9. 1 Sam. xxv. 29.

The wicked will “first” receive the doom for which they are reserved

[They will be cast, like worthless tares, into the furnaceⁱ—

Nor, however God pities them now, will he shew them any mercy then—

Not that the fire shall consume them utterly as it would tares—

To prevent this mistake, the metaphor is intentionally changed—

They will “wail” for the mercies they have despised and the opportunities they have lost—

They will “gnash their teeth” with anguish and vexation of spirit—

— against themselves (like a ruined gamester) for their folly—

— against each other, for having enticed each other to sin—

— against God, with impotent malice, for so punishing their transgressions^k—

And this doom will be inflicted “first” in the very sight of the godly^l—

Thus will the godly see how great mercy they have received—]

The righteous will then receive the kingdom prepared for them

[They, as wheat, shall be treasured up in the granary of heaven—

Not that they shall continue there in a state of inactivity—

To correct this idea the metaphor here is also changed—

God himself will not be ashamed to be called “their Father”—

They shall shine forth in his kingdom like the sun—

Their splendor shall burst forth as from behind a cloud^m—

They delighted to enjoy God; they shall now see him face to face—

They longed to glorify God; they shall now have every faculty employed in his service for evermore—]

The most suitable IMPROVEMENT is suggested by our Lord himselfⁿ

1. Let the profane “hear”

[You can be at no loss to determine whether ye be tares or wheat—

Your

ⁱ Ver. 42.

^k Rev. xvi. 9, 11.

^l Ver. 30.

^m Ἐκλάμψουσιν.

ⁿ Ver. 43.

Your conduct will decide that point beyond a doubt^o—

And are you willing to be daily ripening for the furnace!—

Know that, as ye are at death, ye will continue to all eternity—

But ye may now be changed from tares to wheat—

Though this change cannot take place in nature, it can in the kingdom of grace—

Entreat the Lord then that ye may become new creatures^p—

All that are now in the granary of heaven were once as ye are^q—

And ye, if ye will seek the Lord, shall become as they are—]

2. Let self-deceivers hear

[It is in vain to think yourselves the Lord's people when ye are not—

Enquire whether ye have been truly born again^r?—

See whether ye differ from the world, and from your former selves, as much as wheat differs from tares—

Be not satisfied with “a form of godliness,” and “a name to live”—

The day of final separation is near at hand—

Let every day therefore be spent in earnest preparation for it—]

3. Let the upright also hear

[The unavoidable mixture in the church is doubtless a burthen to you—

And, if you be not careful, it may also become a snare—

But, without judging others, strive to approve yourselves to God^s—

Speedily will the period of your happiness arrive—

Look forward then to death, with composure and gratitude—

Regard it as the wagons sent to convey you home—

And, till it arrive, be praying for the influences of the sun and rain—

So shall you be gathered in due season as a shock that is ripe—

And be transported with joy to your eternal rest—]

^o 1 John iii. 7, 8.

^p 2 Cor. v. 17.

^q Eph. ii. 3. and Gal. iv. 12. in the Greek.

^r John iii. 3.

^s 1 Cor. iv. 5.

CCXXXV. THE SPRINGING FIELD.

Mark iv. 26—29. *And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.*

THERE is a rich variety in the parables delivered by our Lord—

Almost every thing around him was made a vehicle of divine knowledge—

Agriculture in particular afforded him many illustrations of his doctrines—

He dwelt on that subject the more because it was so adapted to his hearers—

In the passage before us he compares the kingdom of God to seed springing up in the field—

This comparison is applicable to the erection of his visible church in the world—

But we shall consider it rather in reference to a work of grace in the soul—

There is a resemblance between seed in a field, and grace in the heart

I. In the manner of their growth

In the parable of the sower our Lord comprehends those characters who receive not the word aright—

In this he confines himself to those characters that are truly upright—

The growth of grace in their hearts resembles that of corn in a field, in that it is

1. Spontaneous

[Seed, when harrowed into the earth, is left wholly to itself—

The husbandman “sleeps by night,” and prosecutes his labours “by day” without attempting to assist the corn in the work of vegetation—

Whatever solicitude he may feel, he abstains from such fruitless endeavours—

“The earth must bring forth the fruit of *itself*,” or not at all—

There

There is a principle of life in the corn which causes it to vegetate—

Nor is it indebted to any thing but the kindly influences of the heavens ^a—

Thus it is with divine grace when sown in the heart of man—

We do not mean that any man *naturally*, and of his own will, lives to God—

This is contradicted by the whole tenor of scripture ^b—

But grace is a seed which has within it a principle of life ^c—

It operates by a power inherent in itself, and is dependent only on him who gave it that power ^d—

The exertions of ministers, however unremitted, cannot make it grow ^e—

It must be left to the operation of its own native energy ^f—

It will then put forth its virtue, through the invigorating beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and the refreshing showers of the Spirit of God—]

2. Gradual

[Seed does not instantly spring up in a state fit for the sickle—

It passes through many different stages before it arrives at maturity—

Thus also in a work of grace “the blade, the ear, and the full corn,” arise in regular succession—

A Christian in his earliest attainments wears a different appearance from what he ever did before—

He is not less altered than a grain of wheat when it puts forth “the blade”—

He feels himself a sinful, helpless and undone creature—

He cleaves to Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour—

And shews by his whole deportment that he has been quickened from the dead—

But still he is prone to entertain self-righteous hopes—

And too often yields to unbelieving fears—

Hence, though sincere at heart, his attainments are but small ^g—

In process of time he shews himself solid and hopeful as “the ear”—

His knowledge of self is more deep, and his views of Christ more precious—

His

^a 1 Cor. xv. 38.

^b Rom. viii. 7.

^c 1 Pet. i. 23. Hence Christ, from whose fulness we receive that grace, is said to live in us, and to be our life. Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 4.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^e 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

^f John iv. 14.

^g Heb. v. 13.

His dependence on the power and grace of Christ is more simple and firm—

Hence, though his conflicts may be more severe, he is more able to sustain them—

Nor is there any part of his conversation wherein his profiting doth not appear^h—

After much experience, both of good and evilⁱ, he becomes like “full corn in the ear”—

Though his views of himself are more humiliating than ever, he is not discouraged by them—

He only takes occasion from them to live more entirely by faith on Christ—

There is an evident ripeness in all the fruit that he brings forth—

Above all he lives in a nearer expectation of “the harvest”—

He sits loose to all the concerns of this present life—

And longs for the season when he shall be treasured up in the garner^k—]

3. Inexplicable

[The most acute philosopher “knoweth not how” the grain vegetates—

That it should die before it springs up^l, and then so change its appearance as to put forth the blade, &c. is a mystery that none can explain—

Thus the operations of grace in the soul of man are also inexplicable—

We know not how the Spirit of God acts on the powers of our mind—

We discover that he does so by the effects; but *how*, we cannot tell—

In this view our Lord compares the Spirit’s agency to the wind, the precise point of whose rise or destination we are unable to ascertain^m—

Nor is the mysteriousness of these changes, which we see in the natural world, ever made a reason for disbelieving them—

Neither should the difficulty of comprehending some things in a work of grace render us doubtful of its reality—]

This resemblance, already so striking, may be further seen

II. In the end for which they grow

The seed grows up in the field in order to the harvest
[The

^h To this effect is St. John’s description of the young men who are in an intermediate state between children and fathers. 1 John ii. 13, 14.

ⁱ Heb. v. 14.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 36.

^k 1 Cor. i. 7. 2 Cor. v. 1—4.

^m John iii. 8.

[The husbandman in every part of his labour has the harvest in view—

He manures, and plows, and sows his ground, in hopes of reaping at last—

In every successive state of the corn he looks forward to the cropⁿ—

And “when the harvest is come,” he “immediately puts in the sickle”—]

Thus also grace springs up in the souls of men to prepare them for glory

[God, having from the beginning chosen his people to salvation, orders every the minutest incident for the accomplishment of his own purpose^o—

All the dispensations of his providence concur for this end—

All the operations of his grace are adjusted with the same view—

The first infusion of a principle of life into our souls is in order to our eternal happiness—

All the ordinances, whereby that life is preserved, are for the same end—

For this, the word distils as the dew, and the clouds drop fatness—

For this, the very things which seem for a time to retard its growth, are permitted—

The gloomy chilling influences of temptation and desertion, are overruled for its final good—

When the soul is ripe for glory, “immediately will the sickle be put in”—

When we are fully meet for the mansion prepared for us, God will receive us to it—

Then will Christ, the great husbandman, rejoice in the fruit of his labours^p—

The ministers also, who laboured under him, will rejoice together with him^q—

And that promise which our Lord has given us shall be fulfilled^r—]

This is a rich source of *comfort to ministers*, and of *encouragement to their people*

[*Ministers*, like the husbandman, are scattering the seeds of God's word—

But, through impatience, are often ready to complain that they have laboured in vain—

They forget that the seed lies long under the clods before it vegetates—

And

ⁿ James v. 7.

^p Isai. liii. 11.

^o 2 Thess. ii. 13, 14.

^q 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

Rom. viii. 28.

^r John iv. 36.

And that much of their seed may spring up, when they have ceased from their labours—

They are often discouraged too by the drooping aspect of their people—

They would wish them to grow up to a state of perfection at once—

And to attain to ripeness without the changes of succeeding seasons—

But it is by such changes that they are brought to maturity^s—

Well therefore may ministers prosecute their work with cheerfulness—

Leaving events to God, they should follow the direction given them in the word^t—

And expect that the promised success shall in due time attend their labours^u—

People also, of every description, may receive much encouragement—

They often are ready to doubt whether “the root of the matter be indeed in them”^v—

Because their progress is not so rapid as they could wish, they are apt to despond—

It is right indeed to examine whether we be really endued with life—

Nor should we rest contented with low degrees of growth—

Whatever joy we feel in seeing the blade, we should grieve if it made no progress—

Thus we should never be satisfied without going on unto perfection—

But let us wait with patience for the former and the latter rain—

Let us expect a variety of seasons as well in the spiritual as the natural world—

Let us commit ourselves to God that he may perfect us in his own way—

Thus in due season shall we be fit for the granary of heaven^w—

The sickle shall then separate us from all our earthly connexions—

And we shall be carried in triumph to our appointed rest—]

^s Rom. v. 3—5.

^u Isai. lv. 10, 11.

^t Eccl. xi. 5, 6.

^v Job v. 26.

CCXXXVI. THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD-SEED.

Mark iv. 30—32. *And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? it is like a grain of mustard-seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth. But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*

“VERY excellent things are spoken of thee, thou City of God”—There is nothing either in heaven or earth which may not well serve to shadow forth thine excellencies—Our Lord had already illustrated the nature of his kingdom by a great variety of most instructive parables; and now stretches, as it were, his invention in order to find other similitudes whereby to make it more fully understood—But choosing, as he always did, to bring his illustrations from things most obvious and familiar, he compares his church and kingdom to a grain of mustard-seed—We shall

I. Illustrate this comparison

“The kingdom of God” means, in this as in a multitude of other places, the *visible* kingdom of Christ established in the world, and his *invisible* kingdom erected in the hearts of men—We must illustrate the comparison therefore

1. In reference to the church of Christ in the world

[The mustard-seed is the smallest of all those seeds which grow to any considerable size—And such was the church of Christ at its first establishment in the world—It consisted at first of our Lord and his twelve disciples; and even after our Lord’s ascension their number was only one hundred and twenty—Soon however it spread forth its branches—As the mustard-seed, notwithstanding its smallness, grows up (in the eastern countries) into a tree of some magnitude, so did the church, notwithstanding its unpromising appearances, extend its limits with astonishing rapidity—In the space of but a very few years, it filled, not Judea only, but the whole Roman empire—Nor is it yet grown to its full dimensions—It will in the latter days overspread the whole earth—All the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ—And as Jews and Gentiles have already taken

taken refuge under its shadow, so shall the people of all nations and languages in God's appointed time^a—]

2. In reference to the grace of God in the heart

[Grace, when first implanted in the soul, is often very small, shewing itself only in some glimmering views, slight convictions, good desires, faint purposes, and feeble endeavours—But in process of time it grows in every part; it shoots forth its roots into the soul, and becomes stronger in all its branches—The faith which was weak is confirmed; the hope that was languishing is made lively and abundant; and the love that was but cold and selfish displays itself with purity and fervour—And all, who come within the sphere of its influence, receive rest and refreshment from its salutary shade^b—Indeed its full growth cannot be seen in this world—For that glorious sight, we must ascend to heaven, where every tree of righteousness flourishes with unfading beauty, and exhibits in the brightest colours the power and efficacy of the Redeemer's grace—]

Such being the import of the comparison, we shall now proceed to

II. Improve it

The parts of our improvement must necessarily have respect to the different views in which the parable has been explained—We shall draw from it therefore some observations

1. For our encouragement respecting the church at large

[It is to be lamented that infidelity and profaneness have overrun the world, and that this tree which the Lord hath planted, has been so "wasted and devoured by the wild beasts of the field"^c—But still the stock remains, nor shall it ever be rooted up—It shall yet "shoot forth its roots downward and bring forth fruit upward"^d—At various seasons the church has been contracted within very narrow limits; yet has always been preserved—In the days of Noah and of Abraham the branches were cut down, and nothing remained but the mere stem; yet it put forth fresh branches, and extended them far and wide—So shall it do yet again, till at last it cover the whole earth—Where there is nothing now but idolatry and every species of wickedness, there shall one day be "holiness to the Lord inscribed upon the very bells of the horses"^e—

Let

^a This by the spirit of prophecy is beautifully described as passing before the prophet's eyes, and as exciting great astonishment in the church itself. Isai. xlix. 18—21.

^b Hos. xiv. 7.

^c Ps. lxxx. 8—13.

^d 2 Kings xix. 30.

^e Zech. xiv. 20.

Let us then water this tree with our prayers and tears—Let us help forward its growth by every means in our power—And look with confidence to that period, when all the nations of the world shall come and sit under its benign shadow—]

2. For our consolation under personal doubts and apprehensions

[From the smallness of our attainments we are sometimes ready to doubt whether the little seed of grace in our hearts will ever grow up to any use or profit—But there is not a saint in heaven whose grace was not once comparatively weak—All were once “as new-born babes;” nor was it till they had learned many humiliating lessons, that they attained to the age of young men and fathers^f—Thus in the natural world, the largest oak was once an acorn, and the largest mustard-tree a little and contemptible seed—Why then should any despond because of present appearances?—Why should not we hope that in process of time our graces shall be strengthened, and our wide-extended branches be filled with fruit?—Our God assures us that *he* does “not despise the day of small things^g ;” why then should *we*?—Let us trust, and not be afraid—Let us look up to heaven for the genial influences of the sun and rain—Nor doubt but that God will accomplish the work he has begun^h ; and “fulfil in us all the good pleasure of his goodness”—]

^f 1 John ii. 12, 13.

^g Zech. iv. 10.

^h Phil. i. 6.

CCXXXVII. LEAVEN HID IN MEAL.

Matt. xiii. 33. *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

AS our Lord was not weary of multiplying his parables, so neither should we be of considering them—There is indeed an inexhaustible variety in them; and in those, which most resemble each other, there will be found a rich and instructive diversity—Scarcely any two are more alike than this and the one which precedes it—But *that* declares the extensive spread of the gospel from small beginnings, and *this* its assimilating and transforming efficacy—In tracing the parallel between the gospel kingdom and leaven hid in the meal, we shall find that they are

I. Assimilating

I. Assimilating in their nature

[Leaven changes not the substance of the meal in which it is hid, but materially alters its qualities—It so impregnates the meal as to transform it, as it were, into its own likeness—Thus does the gospel affect those who receive it into their hearts—It makes us partakers of a divine nature^a—It does not indeed *essentially change* either the faculties of the soul, or the members of the body; but it communicates to them a new life and power, a new direction and tendency—The gospel is compared to a mould, into which souls, when melted by divine grace, are cast^b, and from which they derive a new and heavenly form—Hence, when converted by it, we are said to be renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness^c—And the more this leaven works within us, the more are we changed into Christ's image, from glory to glory^d—

The same effect does the gospel produce also in the world at large—Wherever it prevails, it invariably brings men to the same mind, temper, and disposition—All are rendered vile in their own eyes; all are made willing to receive mercy through Christ alone; and all pant after holiness, as the perfection of their nature and the summit of their bliss—There is indeed a great diversity of parties and opinions respecting things of smaller moment—But in the fundamental points all are agreed, and, when upon their knees before God, have the most perfect resemblance to each other—Being joined to the Lord they are one spirit with him, and with each other^e—The same spirit pervades both the head and all the members—Hence all true Christians of every place and every age are “one bread,” being impregnated with the same heavenly leaven, and formed into one mass for the service of their common Lord and Master^f—]

The resemblance further appears, in that both of them are

II. Mysterious in their operation

[How, in the leavening of meal, the one substance acts upon the other so as to produce a fermentation, is a mystery, which the wisest philosophers are not able to explain—The secret energy of the leaven is discoverable in its effects; but the precise mode of its operation cannot be ascertained—The same difficulty occurs in explaining the operation of the gospel on the hearts of men—Its truths have an energy that is not found in any thing else—The word is quick and powerful and

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

^b Rom. vi. 17. This seems to be the proper meaning of εἰς ἐν παρεδόθητε τύπον διδαχῆς, though it is not so expressed in our translation.

^c Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^d 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^e 1 Cor. vi. 17.

^f 1 Cor. x. 17.

and sharper than a two-edged sword, penetrating the very inmost recesses of the soul^g—But *how* this leaven, as soon as it is put into the heart, begins to work, *how* it operates with such invincible power, and *how* it uniformly changes, as well the most guilty and obdurate hearts, as those which seem more likely to yield to its impressions, *this* is indeed a mystery—The effects produced by it are evident and undeniable; but how it produces those effects so as to transform the vilest sinner into the very image of God, is known to God alone—On account of this mysterious property, our Lord compared the gospel to the wind, which, though manifest enough in its effects, is in many respects inexplicable^h—

If the gospel be so mysterious in its operation upon individuals, it must of necessity be so too in its operation upon the world at large—We pretend not to say *how* the simple doctrine of the cross should be made to triumph over all the prejudices and passions of mankind; but, from what we have already seen, we cannot doubt of its final success—]

Lastly, they are both

III. Universal in their influence

[Leaven, when it has begun to work, never ceases till it has leavened all the meal—Thus does the gospel also work in the hearts of men—It changes, not their outward conduct only, but the inward dispositions of the heart—Both body and soul are thoroughly renewed by it; not indeed perfectly as to the degree, but universally in all their members and all their faculties—Their members are made instruments of righteousnessⁱ, and their faculties are filled with light and holiness—The man is made altogether “a new creature; old things are passed away and all things are become new^k”—

Thus will the world also be regenerated by the grace of the gospel—“Those who are now sitting in darkness and the shadow of death shall behold its light,” and those who are abandoned to the most brutish lusts and ignorance, shall be transformed into the very image of their God—This leaven has long been put into the great mass of mankind—It has already raised a ferment throughout a great part of the world, and in due season shall “leaven the whole lump”—Though its progress be but slow at present, it shall work, till it has pervaded every soul, and “brought all nations to the obedience of faith”—]

The parable thus explained is of signal USE

1. To rectify our judgment

[Some think that they have the grace of God, while yet they

^g Heb. iv. 12.

ⁱ Rom. vi. 13.

^h John iii. 8.

^k 2 Cor. v. 17.

they have never experienced any change in their souls; while others, on account of the commotion raised there, are ready to despond, as though they were utterly abandoned by God—But both of these may see their error, if they will duly consider this parable—*To the former* we would say, Can leaven be put into the meal and no fermentation be produced? much less can the grace of God be in the heart and cause no commotion there—Be assured it will work as it did on the day of Pentecost, and cause you to cry out with earnestness, What shall I do to be saved?—Yea more, if it do not continue to operate, if it do not gradually pervade all your powers, and progressively change them into your Saviour's image, you may be sure that the leaven of divine grace has never yet been put into your hearts—*To the latter* we would say, Be not discouraged at the commotion in your soul, but be thankful for it—It is infinitely better to know our guilt and danger than to be lulled asleep in a fatal security—Your disquietude affords reason to hope that God has caused the heavenly leaven to blend itself with your souls—Give it time then to work—If it be of God, it shall stand—And the effects produced shall discover the true cause from whence they sprang—O beg of God that it may work effectually, and that it may never cease till it has made you “perfect and complete in all his will”—]

2. To reform our hearts

[The true and uniform tendency of the gospel has been abundantly manifest—It is incumbent therefore on every one to ask himself, What reason have I to think that this “kingdom of God is within me¹?” What change has it wrought, what assimilating and transforming efficacy has it discovered?—There is, it is true, a leaven in the heart of natural men; but it is either a “leaven of malice and wickedness^m,” or a “leaven of hypocrisyⁿ”—Whichever of these it be, it must be “purged out, that they may become a new lump^o”—Their souls must be impregnated with a very different leaven, even that of grace and truth—Let us then “hide the word of God within us”; that by its influence we may be renewed^p—Let our prayer be, Lord, “sanctify me through thy truth^q”—And “may the very God of peace sanctify us wholly, that thus our whole body, soul and spirit may be preserved blameless unto his heavenly kingdom^r”—]

¹ Luke xvii. 21.

^o 1 Cor. v. 7.

^q John xvii. 17.

^m 1 Cor. v. 8.

ⁿ Luke xii. 1.

^p Ps. cxix. 11.

^r 1 Thess. v. 23.

CCXXXVIII. THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

Matt. xiii. 44. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

THE gospel, as viewed in various lights, admits of various representations—

It is generally set forth as small in its beginnings, but increasing in importance—

But we must not therefore suppose it to be of small value—

Our Lord sufficiently guards against this mistake by the parable before us—

He shews us, that the gospel, even while hid from our view, is exceeding precious—

It will be proper to shew

I. Why the kingdom of heaven is likened to a “treasure hid”

“The kingdom of heaven” is an expression peculiar to the New Testament

[By it we are not always to understand heaven itself—

It is frequently used to signify Christ’s spiritual kingdom—

And it is so called, because it is the re-establishment of God’s empire over the hearts of men—

And because what is thus begun in grace will be consummated in glory—]

This may well be considered as “a treasure”

[There is no other thing so deserving of this name—

Every subject of it may say with truth, “All things are mine^a”—

He is “blessed—with all spiritual blessings—in heavenly things—in Christ^b”—

Every earthly treasure is contemptible in comparison of it—]

But it is compared to a treasure “hid in a field”

[The mysteries of the gospel were from eternity hid in the bosom of the Father^c—

Neither men nor angels could possibly have devised them—

Who could have thought of bringing man back to God through the death of God’s only Son?—

And

^a 1 Cor. iii. 21.

^b Eph. i. 3.

^c Eph. iii. 9.

And of reducing him to a willing subjection by the operation of God's Spirit?—

A finite mind could never have conceived such an idea—

But these mysteries, though revealed, are still hid from the natural man^d—

They still appear foolishness, and are a stumbling-block to many^e—

Paul, though so learned and religious, could not receive them in his unconverted state^f—

Nor would he ever have embraced them, if God had not opened his eyes^g—

The Apostles, though instructed by our Lord himself all the time of his ministry, needed after all a divine illumination^h—

Nor is a spirit of revelation less necessary for us—

To this very hour there is as much ground as ever for that devout acknowledgmentⁱ—

The "field" indeed, wherein the treasure is hid, is open and accessible to all^k—

But we shall perish for lack of it, unless God do for us as he did for Hagar^l—

We must all adopt the prayer of David^m—]

Its intrinsic worth, joined with the difficulty of finding it, must render the acquisition delightful

II. The emotions which a discovery of it will produce

The illustration given by our Lord is peculiarly apt—

A man who should find a treasure, would have a conflict in his mind

[He would congratulate himself on his good fortune—

And *rejoice* in his prospect of possessing so much wealth—

But he would feel some dread of detection—

He would *fear* lest another should see it, before he had an opportunity of securing it for himself—

He would cover it up carefully, if he could not then carry it away—

And if by purchasing the field he could gain the treasure, he would gladly pay down the price—

In doing this he would use all the expedition and caution that he could—

Nor would he hesitate to sell all that he had, in order to complete the purchase—]

Thus

^d 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^f Acts xxii. 3, 4.

^h Luke xxiv. 45.

^k John v. 39.

^l Gen. xxi. 16, 19.

^e 1 Cor. i. 23.

^g Acts ix. 17, 18.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 23, 26.

^m Ps. cxix. 18.

Thus is a man affected who finds the gospel salvation

[He is filled with *joy* at the glad tidings that he hears ⁿ—

He indulges a hope that he may be interested in them—

He anticipates the happiness of having his sins forgiven—

And of being made an heir of the heavenly inheritance—

Still, however, he is not without many misgiving fears—

He knows that Satan is watching to steal away the treasure ^o—

Nor can he tell but that that serpent may beguile him ^p—

He sees too that the world may deprive him of his hope ^q—

Yea, he perceives in his own heart a proneness to despise the proffered mercy ^r—

Thus is he agitated between hope and fear—

This effect was predicted by the prophets of old ^s—

And it was, on one occasion at least, experienced by the apostles ^t—

But, in the midst of all, *he is determined*, if possible, to possess the treasure—

He undervalues every thing that can stand in competition with it—

He well knows that, whatever he pay for it, he can be no loser—

He approves in his heart the conduct of St. Paul ^u—

And is resolved to follow the advice of Solomon ^x—]

APPLICATION

[The field, which contains this treasure, is nigh at hand—

The owner invites all to go and seek the treasure—

He promises that all who seek in earnest shall find it ^y—

Yea, moreover, that all who find, shall retain it ^z—

Let *those* then *who have never found it*, begin to seek—

But let them adopt that prayer of the apostle ^a—

The Holy Spirit alone can give success to their endeavours ^b—

And let them bear in mind the misery of those who fail ^c—

If any have found it, let them hold fast the prize ^d—

Let them guard against every thing that may rob them of it—

Let them remember, it is not a small treasure, but an inexhaustible mine—

Let them never regret any sacrifice they may make for it—

But look forward to the complete enjoyment of it in heaven—]

ⁿ Matt. xiii. 20.

^o Luke viii. 12.

^p 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^q Mark iv. 19.

^r Matt. xxii. 5.

^s Isai. lx. 5. Jer. xxxiii. 9, 11.

^t Matt. xxviii. 8.

^u Gal. i. 16.

^x Prov. xxiii. 23.

^y Matt. vii. 7, 8.

^z Prov. viii. 35.

^a Eph. i. 17, 18.

^b John xvi. 13, 14.

^c 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

^d Rev. ii. 25. and iii. 3, 11.

CCXXXIX. THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

Matt. xiii. 45, 46. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

MEN are not easily wearied with renewed prospects of gain—

Advantageous bargains may be offered with the greatest frequency without fear of creating disgust—

Our Lord well knew that a love of earthly things was deeply rooted in our hearts—

And availed himself of that knowledge the more forcibly to impress our minds with better things—

He repeatedly commended his gospel to us under the figure of a great temporal acquisition—

In its general scope this parable agrees with that which precedes it—

But it suggests many thoughts that are new and important—

To elucidate it we may consider

I. In what respects the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a pearl

The comparison is not properly between the kingdom and a merchant-man, but the kingdom and a pearl—

The kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of grace established in the world—

And it may be compared to a pearl as ENRICHING

Some pearls are of very great value, and would be an ample fortune to a person who had nothing else—

The gospel kingdom also is of inestimable value to us

In this world

[It unfolds to our view the deepest mysteries—

And gives a just *comprehension* of all spiritual things—

It is said to contain “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^a”—

It must therefore greatly enrich its possessor^b—

The gospel moreover imparts *grace* to the soul—

Nor can this grace be ever appreciated too highly—

Our Lord tells us that it will make us truly rich^c—

Through

^a Col. ii. 3.

^b Prov. iii. 13—15.

^c Rev. iii. 18.

Through the gospel also we obtain *peace* in our consciences—

Who can declare the value of this to a heavy-laden soul?—
It surpasses all estimation as well as all understanding^d—]

In the next world

[The gospel does not enrich us merely like other estates—
We can hold earthly things no longer than this present life—

But the benefits of the gospel continue with us for ever—

We have a more ample possession of them in the next world—

Then we shall have a glorious, and incorruptible inheritance, of which earthly crowns and kingdoms convey a very faint idea—

What is spoken of the Christian's present portion may still more properly be spoken of that which he will hereafter enjoy^e—

Well therefore might St. Paul represent the gospel in such exalted terms^f—]

The gospel kingdom may also be compared to a pearl
as ADORNING

[Pearls are considered as ornamental to the body—
But infinitely more does the gospel adorn the soul—]

It changes the life

[Even the most abandoned of men have yielded to its power—

And that figurative representation has been realized by them^g—]

It purifies the heart

[The most inveterate corruptions have been mortified by it^h—

And the most heavenly dispositions implanted in their steadⁱ—]

It transforms into the divine image

[It finds men altogether “alienated from the life of God”—

And bearing the character of Satan's children^k—

But it renews them in all their faculties—

And restores them to the very image of their God^l—

This effect is ascribed to it by St. Paul himself^m—

How just then is that expression of the Psalmistⁿ!—

And

^d Phil. iv. 7.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 9.

^f Eph. iii. 8.

^g Isai. xi. 6—8.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 11, 12.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 3.

^k John viii. 44.

^l Eph. iv. 24.

^m 2 Cor. iii. 18.

ⁿ Ps. cxlix. 4.

And with what propriety may the Christian exult with the prophet^o!—]

With such views of the gospel we can be at no loss to determine

II. How it will be regarded by those who know its value

It is not possible for them to regard it with indifference—

1. They will seek it with diligence

[Merchants spare no pains in the pursuit of gain—

Much less will they who know the value of the gospel—

They will study that book wherein it is contained—

They will seek instruction from those who are best qualified to explain its mysteries—

They will cry to God for the teaching of his Spirit—

Nor will they be satisfied with obtaining a superficial knowledge of the truth—

They will follow the direction of Solomon^p—

And account its blessings a rich compensation for their trouble—]

2. They will part with all for it

Their carnal enjoyments

[It calls them to sacrifice their dearest interests—

And to give up their nearest relatives for Christ's sake^q—

Nor will they exclaim against this as "an hard saying"—

They will not act like the rich youth who forsook Christ^r—

They will rather part with any thing, however precious, or however necessary^s—]

Their self-righteous hopes

[There is nothing which men are more averse to renounce than their own righteousness—

But a discovery of the gospel will humble them—

It will constrain them to use the language of the prophet^t—

Every Christian will resemble Paul in this^u—]

Their very life itself

[The love of life is inherent in us all—

But the gospel teaches us to overcome it—

It requires us even to hate our lives in comparison of Christ^x—

A view of it will enable us to do this—

And will cause us to say like the holy apostle^y—]

QUESTIONS

^o Isai. lxi. 10.

^p Prov. ii. 4.

^q Matt. x. 37.

^r Mark x. 22.

^s Matt. v. 29, 30.

^t Isai. lxiv. 6.

^u Phil. iii. 7—9.

^x Luke xiv. 26.

^y Acts xx. 24.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the daily object of our pursuit?

[Are we seeking knowledge, wealth, pleasure, honour, &c. or the establishment of this kingdom in our hearts?—

Let us fear lest we never should obtain this invaluable pearl—

And let us follow the direction of our blessed Lord ^z—]

2. What have we parted with for the gospel's sake?

[We are not persecuted now as in former ages—

But every man is called to make some sacrifices—

What then have we forfeited for the sake of Christ?—

If we were suffered to retain only one thing, what should that one thing be?—

Remember, God requires a single eye, and an undivided heart ^a—]

3. If you have purchased this pearl, what are you doing with it?

[It is not to be locked up, as it were, in a cabinet—

You must indeed keep it carefully as a rich treasure—

But you must also wear it about you as an ornament—

It should have the effect on you, that converse with God produced on Moses ^b—

In this way you will commend it to the world—

And will most acceptably comply with our Lord's direction ^c—]

^z Matt. vi. 33.

^b Exod. xxxiv. 35.

^a Luke xi. 34, 35.

^c Matt. v. 16.

CCXL. THE NET.

Matt. xiii. 47—50. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

MEN are forcibly impressed by similes taken from things with which they are well acquainted. Hence the various parables are suited to those classes of the community, who are conversant in the occupations to which they

they relate. The greater part of them refer to the different employments of husbandry, because our Lord sojourned chiefly among persons engaged in agricultural pursuits. But he was also frequently called to instruct fishermen; to whose more immediate use he adapted the parable before us.

In order to elucidate the text we observe that

I. A great variety of persons are gathered by the gospel into the visible church

The gospel is preached promiscuously to all

[When a net is cast into the sea, the fisherman knows not what success he shall have: he may toil all the night and catch nothing; or may inclose a number that can with difficulty be drawn to shore^a. However skilful he may be in his trade, he is dependent wholly on the good providence of God.]

Thus the gospel is published to all without any respect of persons. Nor can the preachers of it command success: if Paul or Apollos labour, it is God alone that can render their endeavours effectual to the salvation of men^b.]

There are however many, for the most part, brought by means of it to a profession of religion

[Where nothing but morality is preached, the people all remain stupid and unconcerned about their souls: but where CHRIST is truly exalted, *some* will feel the constraining influence of the word^c, and be drawn out of the vain world to an attendance on the duties of religion. But of these there will be various kinds: some will go no further than the mere form of godliness^d—others will seem to enjoy somewhat of its life and power, while in reality they have no stability in the ways of God^e, or, though they persevere in their profession of religion, they do not walk worthy of their high calling^f— — There will be others, however, who are truly upright before God, and who “adorn the gospel of God our Saviour in all things”—

All these persons will be collected into a visible church; all will profess an attachment to the gospel: and all will feel some kind of confidence respecting their final acceptance before God.]

But

II. Of those that are gathered, there will be an awful separation in the day of judgment

Fishermen

^a Luke v. 5, 6.

^c Jer. xxiii. 22.

^e Ver. 20, 21.

^b 1 Cor. iii. 7.

^d 2 Tim. iii. 5.

^f Ver. 22.

Fishermen will not encumber themselves with fishes that are worthless; nor will God receive to himself all that are gathered by the gospel.

There will be a separation made in the day of judgment

[God makes use of men to collect persons into the visible church; but he will employ "angels" as his agents to "separate the bad from the good." Nor will they, when acting under the direction of the Most High, be liable to the smallest error. No fisherman can distinguish between the most different sorts of fish more clearly than the angels will, between the weakest of the saints, and the most refined of hypocrites. Not one that is truly good, shall be cast away; nor one that is really bad, be preserved—]

That separation will be inexpressibly awful

[Here the parable was inadequate to convey the truth; and therefore our Lord added a further explanation of it. Fishes that are cast away suffer no otherwise than in meeting death a little sooner than those that are reserved in vessels. But it is not thus with souls that are cast away; for they shall be "cast into a furnace of fire, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth for ever"——O fearful end! how inconceivably different from that of those who shall be treasured up in vessels as "meet for their Master's use!"——]

INFER

1. How diligently should we attend the ordinances of the gospel!

[Ministers are made "fishers of men;" and their one employment is to "catch men."^g Now it is in the ordinances that they go forth to cast their net: and if persons do not attend the ordinances, there is no probability of their ever being drawn to God^h. Let not any trifling matters then be suffered to detain us from the house of God; for we cannot tell the precise time at which God has designed to inclose us in his net. And what a loss should we sustain, if through absence we deprived ourselves of that benefit! Let us then not only come to the house of God, but beg him to instruct his servants how to cast the net in the most advantageous mannerⁱ, for our benefit, and for his glory.]

2. How careful should we be not to rest in an unsound profession of religion!

[It is not every one that is gathered by the gospel, that shall enjoy its saving benefits. Many there are who approve of the truth, and take pleasure in hearing it proclaimed^k, who yet

^g Matt. iv. 19. Luke v. 10.

ⁱ John xxi. 6.

^h Rom. x. 17.

^k Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

yet shall never enter into the kingdom of heaven. Let all then judge themselves by the marks exhibited in the holy scriptures. Let them enquire whether, if the separation were at this instant to be made, they should be found among those that are truly alive to God, or those who, though they "have a name to live, are really dead" before God¹. Let it be remembered that we are now inclosed in the net; and that, though we do not immediately perceive it, the net is at this moment drawing to shore. Speedily will the scrutiny be made; and then the final separation. May God prepare us for that awful day, by renewing our natures, and accepting us in his beloved Son!]

¹ Rev. iii. 1.

CCXLI. THE HOUSEHOLDER.

Matt. xiii. 52. *Every Scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

IT is of importance to all, but especially to those who are to teach others, that they understand clearly the mysteries of the gospel—

An ignorant minister, like a leaky vessel, disappoints those who expect consolation from him—

But a well instructed Scribe or minister resembles a housekeeper or steward, who, having made good provision for the family, feeds them to the full—

With this comparison our Lord encouraged his attentive and intelligent disciples—

The resemblance of every such minister to an householder may be traced in that

I. He is provided with all things necessary for the family over whom he is placed

A steward, or householder, has the charge of providing for the family—

He considers not only what is wanting at the present moment, but what will be wanted on future occasions—

And he preserves for future use the productions of foreign climates, or of succeeding seasons—

Thus every pious minister labours to provide for the church of God

1. He makes himself acquainted with the wants of all his people

[The church, over which he is made an overseer, is God's family—

To supply their returning wants is his peculiar duty—

Hence he is led to reflect upon their various states—

He contemplates the duties and dangers, the trials and temptations, the supports and consolations, experienced by each—

And thus endeavours to learn what will be most suitable to their respective cases—]

2. He lays up in store what he may afterwards bring forth for their use

[The scriptures are the grand repository of sacred knowledge—

These therefore he searches with diligence, and "*treasures*" up with care—

But while he furnishes his mind with "*old things*" he is observant also of "*new*"—

What he daily sees, or hears, or feels, is added carefully to his stock—

Thus his knowledge becomes tempered and matured by experience—

And his fund of information is suited to the necessities of all to whom he ministers—]

In prosecuting his work

II. He dispenses seasonably to each according to their respective wants

A householder, or steward, furnishes out of his store what is wanted for daily use—

And apportions to all the branches of the family what is suited to their respective stations—

Thus a well-instructed minister demeans himself in the church of Christ

1. He gives to all an agreeable variety

[Though Christ and his salvation be the great topic of his discourses, he descends, on proper occasions, to many other subjects connected with it—

He opens the mysteries of the "*Old*" Testament, and illustrates them by the "*New*"—

He declares what God has asserted in his word, and confirms it by daily observation and experience—

And

And though it is not grievous to him to repeat acknowledged truths, he endeavours continually to represent them in a new point of view—]

2. He administers to each his proper portion

[To those whose growth in grace enables them to digest strong meat, he explains the deep mysteries of religion—

To those who can only feed on milk, he contents himself with proposing simply our fall in Adam, and our recovery by Christ—

He considers the peculiar experiences incident to different states, and discriminates between that which is good and bad in each—

He gives the cup of consolation to the drooping penitent, or doubting believer, but holds forth the waters of jealousy to those who are of suspicious character^a—

Thus neither disabled by ignorance nor withheld by sloth, neither bribed by affection nor deterred by fear, he “gives to each his portion of bread in due season”—]

INFER

1. The vast importance of the ministerial office

[If we had only to provide for the body, it were but a small matter—

But the souls of thousands depend on those who minister in holy things—

Well may we say, “Who is sufficient for these things^b?”—

May all who have undertaken the office of the ministry, have grace to qualify themselves for it with diligence, and to execute it with fidelity!—]

2. The benefit arising from it to the church

[How ill supplied would every member of a family be, if each were left to provide for himself!—

And how injurious would such a distraction be to their respective callings!—

Much more would these inconveniencies be felt, if there were no stated ministry—

Let all then be thankful that the Master of the family has appointed stewards to make suitable provision for them—

Let them pray that their ministers may be taught of God to teach others—

And let them improve with diligence the ordinances dispensed among them—]

^a Numb. v. 11—31.

^b 2 Cor. ii. 16.

CCXLII. THE NEW WINE AND OLD BOTTLES.

Luke v. 36—38. *And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old: if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved.*

THE cavils of objectors have been frequently overruled for the benefit of the church—They have given rise to many of our Lord's most instructive discourses, and thereby furnished us with a much clearer and more extensive knowledge of our duty—Thrice in this chapter do we see our Lord called upon to answer the objections that were either secretly entertained or openly expressed against him—His forgiving of sins, and associating with sinners had given offence; but he vindicated his conduct with respect to both, and has afforded us herein a rich discovery of his power and grace—In the context he was condemned for leaving his disciples so much at liberty respecting the duty of fasting—In reply to the queries put to him on this subject, he delivered the parables which we have now read—The substance of them will be brought to your view, while we shew

I. For what ends, and to what extent, austerities are to be practised under the gospel dispensation

The austerities referred to in the text are fasting and solemn seasons of humiliation and prayer^a—

These are certainly necessary under the Christian dispensation

[Our Lord does not say that the children of the bride-chamber were never to fast, but only, not while the bridegroom was with them^b—Nor in the parables before us does he say that the old garment should not be mended, nor the wine put into bottles at all, but only that discretion was to be exercised with respect to the manner of doing these things—These intimations alone were sufficient to establish the propriety of practising the duty there spoken of; but they are enforced

^a Ver. 33.

^b Ver. 34.

enforced by many other passages of holy scripture—Our Lord gives directions respecting our behaviour when we fast ^c; and indeed expressly says that, after his removal from them, his disciples should fast ^d—]

But the necessity for such austerities exists only in a certain view and to a certain extent

[We are not to suppose that the practice of austerities constitutes any part of religion itself—Nor can they merit any thing, as the papists imagine; nor should they be multiplied after human inventions—Nor indeed should we so practise them as to injure our health, or to induce a neglect of our social duties—They are to be regarded only as the scaffold to the building, or the means to the end—The intent of them is, to subdue our appetites, and to bring our thoughts and desires into obedience to Christ—There are indeed particular occasions, which demand peculiar abstinence and self-denial^e—As there are seasons for holy feasting and joy, so are there also for fasting and sorrow ^f—Wisdom and sincerity are requisite for the forming a right judgment respecting these things—But rightly understood, and duly practised, they will conduce much to our advancement in true piety—]

The caution given respecting them in the text leads us to observe, that

II. However proper they are in their place, yet an injudicious attempt to enforce the practice of them will injure rather than subserve the interests of religion

The enjoining of austerities is injudicious, if it be either unseasonable or unsuitable for the persons on whom they are imposed

[It would, as our Lord observes, be unseasonable to mourn at a wedding feast: and it would be unsuitable to patch a piece of new and harsh cloth on a garment that was old and rent; or to put a strong fermenting wine into old *leathern* bottles—Thus the prescribing of difficult and severe duties to a young convert would be unsuitable, because he cannot be supposed to have attained strength sufficient for the performance of them—]

An attempt to impose them under such circumstances will do an injury to religion

1. It will give wrong notions of religion itself

[*The world* is ready enough to take up bad impressions of religion, however wisely it be described, or faithfully practised—

But

^c Matt. vi. 16—18.

^e Matt. xvii. 21. 1 Cor. vii. 5.

^d Ver. 35.

^f Eccl. iii. 4.

But what will they say if we represent it in a formidable shape?—Surely they will exclaim against it as gloomy, superstitious, hateful—What a stumbling-block must this lay in their way!—What an obstacle must this be to the spread of the gospel!—Yea, what a dishonour to Jesus himself to represent his yoke so heavy, and his burthen so intolerable!—Besides, *the sincere enquirer* after truth will be likely to be misled—He will suppose that Christianity consists rather in the performance of penances than in the exercise of holy and devout affections—Surely we should be cautious not to give occasion for such unfounded sentiments, and such fatal errors—]

2. It will discourage the weak in their pursuit of religion

[When the weak address themselves to such duties, they will be disgusted and disheartened—And perhaps from despair of attaining to religion will relinquish the pursuit of it altogether—As new wine would burst the leathern bottles that by long use and age are become too weak to resist the fermentation, and the wine as well as the bottles would perish; so will both the religion we inculcate, and the persons on whom we impose it, be likely to perish, if, through an ill-judged zeal, we neglect to suit our advice to the strength of those who receive it—Our Lord himself forbore to say many things to his disciples because they were not yet able to receive them^g—And St. Paul fed the Corinthian converts with milk and not with meat, because they were not yet able to digest strong food^h—Their conduct in these respects exemplified the subject we are considering; and must be imitated by us, if we would advance the interests of religion in the world—]

This subject may teach us

1. To judge with candour

[We are but too apt to judge of others by our own experience, and to condemn them as enthusiasts if they exceed, or as lukewarm if they fall short of, the standard we have raised—Even sincere persons will sometimes be found uniting with Pharisees in calumniating the children of God—But it is not our province, nor are we competent, to judge others—The disciples of John might do right in fasting often, and yet the disciples of Jesus not do wrong in forbearing to fast—There are many things belonging to the situations of individuals, of which God alone can judge—We must therefore leave every man to “stand or fall to his own master”—Every one should labour to approve himself to God, and allow to others the liberty of judging and acting for themselves—]

2. To prescribe with wisdom

[Not ministers only, but all Christians who are advanced in

^g John xvi. 12.

^h 1 Cor. iii. 2.

in religion, are called upon to give advice—This office should be performed with much caution—We should be careful “not to break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax”—As Jacob would not over-drive his flocks lest he should kill the lambsⁱ, so should we pay an especial attention to the weak—We should imitate our good shepherd who “carries the lambs in his bosom, and gently leads them that are with young”—We must not indeed dissemble with any, or encourage them in the ways of sin—But there may be too much severity as well as too much laxness in our injunctions and advice—We must act in spiritual things as we do in administering to the bodily wants of those who depend on us; We “feed the babes with milk, and give strong meat to those only who, by reason of age, are able to digest it^k”—]

3. To press forward with diligence

[Our Lord intended that his disciples should advance—Accordingly we find Paul “in fastings often”—And the Israelites, whom God would not at first lead through the land of the Philistines lest they should be discouraged at the sight of their enemies, were afterwards brought to engage in a continued scene of warfare—Thus must we be fighting the good fight of faith—We must not be always children, nor must we ever think we have yet attained; but must press forward to higher attainments and more arduous duties—If at any time we be under darkness or distress of any kind, *that* is a call for more particular humiliation and contrition—But, independent of any peculiar call, it will be our wisdom to live much in the exercise of secret fasting and prayer—Our trouble will be richly recompensed, and our advancement greatly promoted—Let us then watch unto prayer, and, like the great apostle, “keep our body under and bring it into subjection, lest after having advised others, we ourselves should become cast-aways^l”—]

ⁱ Gen. xxxiii. 13.

^k Heb. v. 12—14.

^l 1 Cor. ix. 27.

CCXLIII. THE MEANS OF SPIRITUAL DEFILEMENT.

Mark vii. 14—16. *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Harken unto me every one of you, and understand. There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

IT is by no means uncommon to see an excessive attachment to human institutions in those who have very little

little regard for the laws of God—Persons of this description are ever eager to censure a trifling deviation from some foolish custom, while they allow themselves in a constant violation of the most important duties—They strain at a gnat and swallow a camel—Such were the Pharisees of old—They had condemned our Lord's disciples for not complying with their traditions—Our Lord therefore first exposed their hypocrisy, and then vindicated his followers by a very apposite parable—

In illustration of the parable we shall endeavour to shew

I. What it is which defiles the soul

Our Lord observes, that “whatsoever entereth into a man cannot defile him”—Not but that a man is defiled by drunkenness and excess—But it is the disposition which is indulged, and not the mere act of eating or drinking, that constitutes that defilement—As the heart is the seat of spiritual defilement, so that alone which proceeds from it, or resides in it, can render him unclean in the sight of God—The things therefore which defile a man are

Evil words

[These proceed out of the abundance of the heart—And alas! what “filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness” do they betray!—What a want of reverence for the Deity is discovered by *profane* words—Well does God say that “He will not hold those guiltless” who utter them—*Angry and passionate* expressions manifest a murderous rancour in the heart^a—And justly subject those who use them, to the punishment of hell-fire^b—*Lying* is held in abhorrence even by those who are most addicted to the practice of it—Nor can persons who give way to it have any portion in the kingdom of heaven^c—Who would augur well of that heart, which gives vent to *slander and calumny*?—Or who does not approve the sentence of excision, which David had decreed against those who should be notoriously addicted to such habits^d?—Pleasing as *flattery* is to our vain minds, every one is disgusted with it except when it bears the semblance of truth—Nor will God fail to punish those who so basely prostitute the powers of speech^e—Even an *idle* word is odious in the sight of God—And a strict account of it shall be rendered in the day of judgment^f—]

Evil

^a 1 John iii. 15.

^c Rev. xxii. 15.

^e Ps. xii. 3.

^b Matt. v. 22.

^d Ps. ci. 5.

^f Matt. xii. 36.

Evil dispositions

[There is not any thing more sordid and grovelling than a *worldly and covetous* disposition—The object of its desire is always stigmatized by the name of “*filthy lucre*”—As for *envy*, it is justly represented as rottenness in the bones^g—It even operates as a disorder to reduce our bodily frame, at the same time that it wastes and destroys the soul—*Censoriousness* is nearly allied to this; and no less indicates a narrow, selfish, and base mind—What stronger symptom of internal depravity can there be than a *peevish, discontented, murmuring* spirit?—Even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of those who should indulge such a temper, that God would execute his judgments upon them^h—*Levity* is less hateful indeed; but it argues an unmindfulness of the divine presence, and a state of soul very unbecoming those who are on the brink and precipice of eternity—Nor is *sloth* by any means a small indication of a corrupt heart—It enervates all our powers, and unfits us for the service either of God or man—In what light our Lord regards this disposition we clearly see by that address of his, “Thou wicked and slothful servant;” “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.”]

Evil thoughts

[The very “thoughts of our hearts are all naked and open before God”—And he regards them as infallible marks of the state of our souls—Those thoughts indeed which are rejected instantly with indignation, do not leave any stain upon the soul—But those which are in the least degree harboured and indulged, most assuredly defile us—We are told that “the very thought of foolishness is sinⁱ”—And Simon Magus was exhorted to “pray that the thought of his heart might be forgiven him^k”—Indeed it is but a small part of the wickedness of the heart that discovers itself by words and actions—All sin is first conceived in the imagination; and much lies buried there for want of an opportunity to break forth—Who can number the *proud*, the *impure*, the *uncharitable*, the *revengeful*, the *unbelieving*, and the “*vain* thoughts that often lodge in the soul?”—Or who can estimate the guilt which we contract by means of them?—It is worthy of remark, that these are the very things whereby our Lord himself says that the heart is defiled^l—And these are the things which, when brought to maturity, fill the world with adulteries, murders, and ail manner of abominations^m—]

The very peculiar manner in which this truth is delivered by our Lord, leads us to shew

II. The

^g Prov. xiv. 30.^k Acts viii. 22.^h Jude 14—16.^l Ver. 21—23.ⁱ Prov. xxiv. 9.^m Jam. iv. 1.

II. The importance of understanding and knowing this

Our Lord "called all the people unto him;" he addressed them not only collectively, but, as it were, individually, "every one"—He repeated his exhortation, "Hearken, and understand"—And lastly, he confirmed it with a very emphatical admonition, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"—Now the reason of all this solemnity will appear, if we consider, that on the clear knowledge of this truth depends our knowledge of every thing that is important in religion—Without it we cannot know

1. The extent of our own depravity

[While we think that our defilement arises principally from outward actions, we shall entertain a good opinion of ourselves--If we have been kept from flagrant transgressions, we shall be, like Paul in his unconverted state, "alive without the law"—But if the spirituality of the commandment, and our deviations from the line of duty, be made to appear to us, we like him shall "die," that is, we shall see ourselves dead in trespasses and sinsⁿ—Knowing the depravity of our own hearts, we shall be willing to humble ourselves before God as undone sinners—We shall cry like Job, Behold, I am vile; I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes—Now till we be thus brought to loathe ourselves, we have no genuine repentance—We must therefore learn wherein spiritual defilement consists, if ever we would have the guilt of it removed from our souls—For, except we repent, we must perish—]

2. The impossibility of cleansing ourselves

[The lopping off a few branches of sin is no more than what an unregenerate person may do—While therefore he supposes that all his defilement consists in those, he will be depending on his own strength—But our disorder is far beyond any remedy of our own prescription—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint"—"Every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts has been only evil continually"—We must, therefore, become entire new creatures—"Old things must pass away, and all things must become new"—And is such a change within the power of unassisted man to effect?—Let any one strive to put away every evil disposition, and to suppress with indignation every rising thought of sin—Let him plant the contrary dispositions in his heart, and cherish with delight the thoughts that are of a contrary tendency—

He

ⁿ Rom. vii. 9.

He may as well attempt to build a world as to do this in his own strength ^o—Yet this must be done—We do not say that a person must be absolutely perfect here; but he must pant after perfection, and loathe himself for every remaining imperfection even of thought—Surely this must be the work of that almighty agent who spake the universe into existence, and brought order and beauty out of the shapeless chaos ^p—And when we know the depth of our depravity, then and then only, shall we be willing to seek help from Him on whom it is laid—]

3. The suitableness and excellency of the gospel salvation

[While ignorant of our own depravity, we are unaffected with the tidings of the gospel—Others may appear to need a fountain, but we do not, because we have very little pollution—Others may need a new heart, but we have a very good one by nature—Thus the offers of the gospel are of no value in our eyes—But when we know the depth of our corruptions, we are thankful to hear of a fountain opened for sin; and the promise of a new heart is precious to our souls ^q—The gospel *then* appears exactly suited to our necessities, and “every thing is accounted as dung and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of it”—]

APPLICATION

1. To those who lay a stress on formal services

[We mean not to depreciate an outward conformity to religion—But where there is no more than that, the soul is in a lost and perishing condition—*Tha*: is only like “the painting of a sepulchre which is full of rottenness and all uncleanness”—Remember then ye must “lay the axe to the root of the tree”—“Ye must be born again”—This is the solemn and repeated declaration of Christ himself—“Ye must be born of the Spirit, or ye can never enter into the kingdom of God”—Hearken then, and understand this solemn admonition—Let every one of you apply it to himself—Cry with David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me”—If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear—]

2. To those who have begun to experience vital and spiritual religion

[It is an unspeakable blessing to know any thing of your own hearts—Nor can you ever be sufficiently thankful to him who has discovered to you “the mystery of iniquity” within you—But what earnest heed ought you to take lest you be drawn

^o Jer. xiii. 23.

^p Eph. i. 19, 20, and ii. 10.

^q Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

drawn again under the power of your corruptions!—You still carry about with you “a body of sin and death”—“The flesh lusteth still against the spirit as well as the spirit against the flesh”—Let it then be your daily endeavour to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts”—Be daily “putting off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be putting on the new man,” &c.—It is a solemn admonition which God has given you, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy”—“Ye are now the temple of the Holy Ghost;” O guard against every thought or desire that may grieve your divine guest—You must resist the first risings of inclination—A desire indulged will blind the eyes, and harden the heart, and bring in with it an host of sins—Above all, commit yourselves to that almighty Saviour, who has promised to preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom—So shall you be washed in his blood from every fresh contracted stain—And be rendered “meet for the inheritance of the saints in light”—]

CCXLIV. THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND.

Luke vi. 39. *And he spake a parable unto them; Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?*

IGNORANCE is, in itself, more excusable than vice—
But in some cases its effects are equally pernicious ^a—
This is manifestly true in the concerns of the soul—

A person, ignorant of the way of salvation, must fall short of heaven—

And, if he undertake to direct others, will ruin all who follow him—

To impress this truth on our minds, our Lord repeatedly uttered this parable ^b—

I. The scope of the parable

The Pharisees, through their professed sanctity, gained extensive influence—

And

^a A person may ruin himself no less by imprudence than by debauchery; and a General may bring as great calamities on his army through unskillfulness, as if he had betrayed them into the hands of their enemies.

^b Matt. xv. 14.

And were implicitly followed by the deluded populace—
The consequences were extremely fatal to them both—
In this parable our Lord intended to reprove

1. The presumption of such guides

[No man should undertake an office for which he is not qualified—

Much less so important an office as that of guiding men to heaven—

Yet many assume it for filthy lucre sake, without any other qualification than that of a little human learning—

But what would be thought of a man, who, because he was conversant with the learned languages, and philosophy, should engage to navigate a ship?—

Yet he would only subject a few hundreds of persons to temporal death—

Whereas a minister that misleads his people, involves thousands in everlasting destruction—

How horrible is such presumption! and how surely must it bring down upon the offenders the signal vengeance of heaven^c!—

Let all who would not perish under such an accumulated load of guilt, examine well their motives for undertaking, their qualifications for discharging, and their manner of executing, this high office^d—]

2. The folly of such followers

[The generality never once consider whether their guide be competent to direct them, nor enquire into the truth of the directions given them—

They commit their souls to his care, as though there were no possibility of erring, or no danger in error—

They even prefer such teachers as “prophesy unto them smooth things^e”—

But would any man act thus in matters of less importance?—

Would any person who had a disorder to be healed, or a cause to be tried, employ a physician or a lawyer that was ignorant

^c 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21.

^d It should be remembered, that it is not human learning which can qualify a man for the ministerial office, but rather an experience of true religion in his own soul. The Pharisees were acquainted with *the letter* of the scriptures, but they understood not *the spirit* of them: they saw not the spirituality of the moral law, nor the typical import of the ceremonial law. Thus being ignorant of their fallen state, and of the means appointed for their recovery, they were only blind guides. *A man must be converted himself, before he undertakes to convert others*: he must be able to adopt the language of the apostle. See 1 John i. 1, 3.

^e Isai. xxx. 9—11. Jer. v. 30, 31.

ignorant of his profession, if he could have access to one of approved ability?—

Would any blind person commit himself to the guidance of one who also was destitute of sight?—

Can any one doubt what would be the consequence of such folly?—

What madness then is it for men to rest satisfied with the instructions of those, whose whole dispositions and conduct manifest, that they are ignorant of the way to heaven!—

That their guides will be partakers of their doom, will afford but little consolation to them, when they themselves are suffering the bitter consequences of their folly—*]

The truth asserted in the parable is too obvious to need either proof or illustration: we shall therefore proceed to consider

II. The lessons we should learn from it

Though the familiarity of our Lord's expressions appears at first sight calculated to produce a smile, they afford just occasion for the most solemn admonitions.

1. Guard against error in the concerns of your souls

[Many suppose that ignorance is an excuse for error—

But God has sufficiently warned us against this mistake^f—

It is certain, that there is a great diversity of doctrines among those who undertake to teach———

And, that error is more prevalent than truth———

But the multitudes who throng the broad road, cannot procure safety for those who walk in it—

We must dare to leave the beaten track of self-righteousness and formality, for the less frequented path of faith and holiness—

Nor must we hope to reach the fold of God, unless we follow the footsteps of his flock^g—]

2. Try what you hear by the touchstone of God's word

[The scriptures are the only proper rule of our faith and practice—

To them we must refer every thing as to an unerring standard^h—

NOI

* The whole of this subject requires to be treated with peculiar tenderness, lest we appear to be bringing only a railing accusation against our brethren, when we should be seeking rather the edification of our flock. We must not indeed shrink from expounding any portion of God's word; but we must always be careful to "speak the truth *in love*."

^f Hos. iv. 6. Isai. xxvii. 11. Eph. v. 6.

^g Cant. i. 8. Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^h Isai. viii. 20.

Nor must any human authority supersede the exercise of our own judgmentⁱ—

If an angel from heaven were to preach, we ought to try his word by this test—

This was approved in the Bereans of old^k; and it is expressly enjoined on us^l—]

3. Seek the instruction and guidance of the Holy Spirit

[Hōwēver plainly man may preach, God alone can enable you to profit^m—

Of yourselves you will be far more ready to embrace the self-exalting tenets of deceivers, than the humiliating doctrines of the gospel—

But the Holy Ghost shall be given to those who seek his influenceⁿ—

And shall guide into all truth those who submit to his teaching^o—

Let all then, whatever be their capacity or attainments, implore his help—

Then, though babes in human science, they shall be taught the things that are hid from the wise and prudent^p—]

ⁱ Matt. xxiii. 8—10.

^k Acts xvii. 11.

^l 1 Thess. v. 21.

^m Isai. xlvi. 17.

ⁿ Luke xi. 13.

^o John xvi. 13. 1 John ii. 20.

^p Matt. xi. 25, 26.

CCXLV. A LITTLE CHILD.

Matt. xviii. 1—4. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

DISPUTES of any kind among the children of God are most unbecoming their holy character, more especially when they originate in a competition for pre-eminence—Yet such is the depravity of our nature, that we are prone to affect superiority and distinction even after we have seen the vanity of earthly things—The disciples of Christ, as well from their condition in the world

world as from the example set before their eyes, seemed least exposed to such a temptation; yet even they repeatedly manifested an ambitious desire of worldly honours—They had been disputing who among them should be the greatest in that earthly kingdom which they supposed their Master was about to establish—Our Lord knowing all which had passed in their hearts, interrogated them with respect to the subject of their conversation—But they, ashamed of it (as well they might be) held their peace—Finding however that all attempts to conceal it from him were in vain, they referred the matter to his decision^a—Our Lord did decide it; but in a way they little expected—He exhibited before their eyes an emblem of true greatness, and shewed them

I. The nature of conversion

The conversion here spoken of means either a deliverance from that sin of which they were guilty, or a turning from sin in general^b—Taking it in the more enlarged sense, it imports the becoming like a little child

1. In humility of mind

[A little child is not filled with notions of his own greatness and self-sufficiency, but feels his dependence on others for support—Happy would it be for us if such were the habit of our minds towards God—But fallen nature is far removed from such a state as this—We universally think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think—And imagine ourselves possessed of whatever is necessary for our salvation—But in conversion our views are greatly changed—We are brought to acknowledge our extreme guilt and helplessness—And are made willing to depend on Christ alone for righteousness and strength^c—]

2. In teachableness of disposition

[Man in his natural state is as prone to lean to his own understanding as to trust in an arm of flesh—Almost every one thinks he knows his duty; nor do they who confess their need of human instruction, feel any want of the teachings of God's spirit—But in this respect also their views are altered as soon as they partake of converting grace—As a little child is sensible

^a Compare St. Mark's account, Ch. ix. 33—35.

^b Our Lord's words may be understood either as a particular admonition to *them*, or as a general declaration grounded on this particular occurrence.

^c See St. Paul's views of these things before and after his conversion, Rom. vii. 9. and Phil. iii. 6, 7.

sensible of his ignorance, and ready to receive, without gain-saying, the instructions given him, so the converted person, conscious that he knows nothing as he ought to know, desires to have the eyes of his understanding enlightened—He no longer disputes against the declarations of scripture, but receives them implicitly, and looks up to God for that spiritual discernment whereby alone he can discover their truth and importance^d—]

3. In indifference to the world

[The world is the idol which man in his unconverted state adores—Its riches and honours are the great objects of his affection and pursuit—In this he is the very reverse of a little child—An infant has no solicitude about earthly distinctions—Satisfied with the one object of his desire, he leaves others to contend for power and pre-eminence—Thus it is with the Christian that is truly converted to God—He has one great concern which occupies his mind, one great prize which he is seeking to obtain—Whether he have much or little of this world he judges to be a matter of little consequence—He does indeed covet riches and honour; but it is the honour that cometh of God, and the unsearchable riches of Christ—And excessive cares about earthly honours or wealth he leaves to those who have no inheritance beyond the grave^e—]

Having shewn his disciples by this emblematical representation what conversion was, our Lord proceeded to declare

II. The importance of it

This he suggests in two different points of view

1. Without such conversion no man can be partaker of the kingdom of grace on earth, or the kingdom of glory in heaven

[Conversion is necessary before we can be truly admitted into *the kingdom of grace on earth*—We are indeed received into covenant with God in baptism; but it is regeneration that really makes us his children—We can never come to Christ as a Saviour, till we feel our need of him—We cannot learn of him, till we be willing to be taught—Nor can we ever glorify him, till we be dead to the things of time and sense—The gate is too strait for us; the way of admission is too humiliating—The laws of his kingdom are such that our carnal minds neither will nor can obey them^f—Nor can we ever partake of his *kingdom of glory* unless we experience this change—What could we do in heaven even if we were admitted there? We should have no meetness for it, no dispositions suited to the enjoyment

^d Job xxxiv. 32. Ps. cxix. 18.

^e Gal. vi. 14. *δι' ἧς* by which.

^f Rom. viii. 7.

enjoyment of it—The glorified saints all cast their crowns before the feet of Jesus, and prostrate themselves in deep humility, ascribing all their salvation to him—How could we unite with them when we have never deigned to glorify him thus on earth?—As for our worldly desires, what should we find to gratify them there?—Heaven could be no heaven to us, if our affections were not set on the things that are there, and our employments suited to the exercises of that blessed state—]

2. In proportion as we experience such conversion will be our exaltation here and hereafter

[Our Lord now plainly answers the question put to him— Let any one point out to us the person that most eminently resembles a little child, and we will immediately point out to him the greatest person in the world—It is not human grandeur that constitutes a person great, but moral excellence— “The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,” whatever other advantages his neighbour may possess—Even the ungodly cannot but admire those most, who are most truly humble—At the very time that they revile and persecute them, they reverence them in their hearts, and have a secret wish that they themselves were like them—And the godly invariably admire those most who are the greatest proficients in this grace—The exaltation of such persons *hereafter* will certainly also be proportionably great—Perhaps there is not one in heaven nearer the throne of God than he, who, when on earth, called himself “less than the least of all saints^g”—Indeed God has repeatedly assured us that “he who humbleth himself shall be exalted”—]

We may IMPROVE this subject

1. For conviction

[How few are there who truly resemble a little child!—By the generality such a disposition would be considered as mean, abject, enthusiastic—But let it be remembered that it is absolutely necessary for the salvation of our souls—If a conversion from *one* particular sin was necessary in order to the salvation of the apostles, notwithstanding all they had experienced, how much more must conversion be necessary for us, whose sins are so multiplied, and whose attainments are so small—Let us receive this declaration then as from the lips of him who shall judge the world—Let us apply to ourselves that solemn word, YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN^h—And let us instantly seek that change which is so difficult in its attainment, and so important in its consequences—]

2. For

^g Eph. iii. 8.

^h John iii. 3, 5, 7.

2. For instruction in righteousness

[Have we been renewed in the spirit of our minds? Let us seek to be renewed more and more—The apostles had forsaken all for Christ, and yet relapsed into the sin of worldliness and ambition—We never can become so childlike but that there may be room for farther advancement—Let the presence then of a little child be always a source of instruction to us—Let us observe his simplicity of mind, and unity of desire; and let us regard him as a pattern for imitation—This was the very mind of Christ himself, who, being in the form of God, humbled himself, and took upon him the form of a servant—Let the same mind therefore be in us that was in himⁱ—“Seekest thou great things unto thyself? seek them not^k:?” “Mind not high things, but condescend to low things^l”—“Whosoever would become the greatest of all, let him make himself the least of all, and the servant of all”—]

ⁱ Phil. ii. 5, 6.^k Jer. xlv. 5.^l Rom. xii. 16. in the Greek.

CCXLVI. AN OFFENDING MEMBER.

Mark ix. 43—48. *If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands, to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

TO oppose and persecute the people of God is to make God himself our enemy—Nor can we cast a stumbling-block in their way without aggravating thereby our own condemnation^a—But it is not only by open profaneness that we endanger our salvation; we are no less obnoxious to the displeasure of God if we retain any secret sin—Hence our Lord gives us the most solemn and repeated admonition to cut off every occasion

^a Ver. 42.

occasion of sin—In discoursing on his words we shall consider

I. His injunctions

There are many things which prove to us an occasion of sin

[We are too ready to be drawn aside by our *worldly interests*—How often have they led men to profane the sabbath, to engage in unlawful occupations, to practise deceit and falsehood, and in a thousand other ways to violate the dictates of their conscience!—How has an undue regard to them deterred many from embracing the gospel and following the Lord fully^b!—And how many have been turned aside by them from the truth of God, even after they had maintained a long and honourable profession^c!—*Carnal affections* also frequently prove a very fatal snare—How many spiritual people have been led to connect themselves for life with an unconverted person, through an unwillingness to thwart their natural inclinations, and *that* too, in opposition to the most express commands of God^d—How many through an excess of attachment have idolized the creature while they possessed it, and murmured against God the instant it was removed!—Need we add *sensual appetites* to this black catalogue? who, that knows the danger of an impure look^e, must not tremble!—]

These, as soon as ever we discover their baneful tendency, should be cut off

[We are far from condemning these things as bad in themselves—Our carnal appetites and affections were given us to be indulged, and our worldly interests indispensably require a considerable degree of care and attention—But when they become stumbling-blocks to us and betray us into sin, then they become sinful in themselves, and must instantly be cut off—Nor must any consideration whatever induce us to spare them—If they be dear to us as an “eye,” or useful, and apparently necessary to us as a “hand” or “foot,” we must sacrifice them without pity or reserve—Different situations indeed call for much prudence and discretion in the execution of this duty—We must not lose sight of meekness and humility when we are exercising a necessary firmness and self-denial—Nevertheless we must not tamper with our conscience, but fulfil our duty, and leave events to God—]

To aid us in obeying our Lord's injunctions let us consider

II. The

^b Mark x. 22.

^c 2 Tim. iv. 10.

^d 2 Cor. vi. 14, 17.

^e Matt. v. 28, 29.

II. The arguments with which he enforced them

Men in general are averse to hear any thing of the terrors of the Lord—But St. Paul insisted on them in order to persuade men—And our Lord himself frequently urged them on his hearers as inducements to obedience—The arguments with which he enforced his precepts in the text are most solemn and weighty

1. God will surely deal with men hereafter according to their conduct in this life

[This truth is not merely asserted, but assumed in the text as incontrovertible and undoubted—Nor is there any truth whatever, that is more agreeable to reason, or more abundantly confirmed by the sacred oracles^f—And can any thing be a stronger argument for self denial?—Surely if eternal happiness or misery must be the issue of our conduct, we should diligently consider our ways, and put away the accursed thing that would ruin our souls—If we had no future account to give of our conduct, we might say, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die”—But, if we believe the scriptures, we shall rather labour to act with a view to the future judgment—]

2. Heaven, notwithstanding all the trials we may endure in our way to it, is infinitely better than hell, whatever we may enjoy in our way thither

[It is certain that the mortification of sin is often painful like the cutting off of a member from the body—But it is no less certain that *that* pain is followed by much peace and joy—But supposing the road to heaven were ever so thorny, will not eternal glory be a sufficient recompence for our toil?—And supposing the gratifications of sin to be without alloy (though it will be found that the delicious draught is mixed with much gall) will they not be dearly purchased with the loss of the soul?—Will not the torments of hell be greater than the pleasures of sin?—The worms that may feed upon the body will die when our flesh is consumed; and the fire that may consume our body will be extinguished at last for want of fuel—But “the worm that will gnaw our conscience will never die; nor will the fire of God’s wrath be ever quenched,” because we shall be preserved as food for the one and fuel for the other to all eternity—What can sin offer us that can compensate for such a doom?—Surely then this argument should induce us to mortify our most beloved lusts—Our Lord repeats it thus frequently, that it may the more deeply impress our minds—Let us then weigh it with the attention

^f Rom. viii. 13. Gal. vi. 7, 8.

attention it deserves; and act as those who feel its force and importance—]

INFER

1. In what a lamentable state are the world at large!

[Men will persuade themselves that they are in the way to heaven, even while they are neglecting many duties, and committing many actual sins—But can they derive much encouragement from the words of our text?—O that they did but credit the declarations of our Lord!—Shall they, who retain only *one* bosom lust, be in danger of “hell-fire,” and they be safe who live in the *allowed* commission of *many* sins?—Have *they* no reason to dread the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched?—Shall they set up their idols in their heart, and God not answer them according to the multitude of their idols?—Would to God that we could weep over such poor deluded creatures; that “our head were waters, and our eyes a fountain of tears to run down for them day and night!”—May God give them just views of the eternal world!—And may they be so persuaded by these terrors of the Lord, as to flee immediately from the wrath to come, and to lay hold on eternal life!—]

2. What need have the professors of religion to watch over their own hearts!

[It is no easy thing to know whether we be freed from our besetting sin—We have many pleas to urge in extenuation of its guilt, and many specious names whereby to conceal its malignity—How were even the disciples themselves led captive by ambition and revenge, when they were least aware of their subjection to such evil principles^h!—Thus it may be with us also—How then should we search and try our hearts to find out our besetting sins!—And how should we cry to God, “Search me, O God, and try the ground of my heart, &c.ⁱ!”—Let all then who name the name of Christ be jealous of themselves—And “laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset them, let them run their race with patience”—]

3. What reason have we to be thankful for the covenant of grace!

[Whatsoever God requires of us, he has also promised to us in the covenant of grace—Has he commanded us to part with every sin, however precious or profitable it may be? He has also promised, that “sin shall not have dominion over us^k.”—He has pledged his word not only to forgive the sins of

^g Ezek. xiv. 4.

ⁱ Ps. xxxix. 23, 24.

^h Mark ix. 34. Luke ix. 54.

^k Rom. vi. 14.

of the penitent, but to “cleanse them from all unrighteousness¹”—Let those then who tremble at the injunctions in the text, look up to Jesus for help—Let them plead the promises which he has made—And doubtless they shall find his “grace sufficient for them”—“They shall do all things through Christ strengthening them”—This is the portion of all who embrace that covenant, which “is ordered in all things and sure^m”—Let every believer then rejoice in that covenant; and “hold fast the beginning of his confidence stedfast unto the end”—]

¹ 1 John i. 9.

^m 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

CCXLVII. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

Matt. xviii. 32—35. *Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

MEN in general think themselves sufficiently instructed in morality—

But, for the most part, their views of it are very partial and defective—

The duty of forgiving injuries is universally acknowledged—

But few are aware to what an extent it is required of them—

Peter, though a good man, needed much instruction on this head—

He thought the limits he assigned to this principle were generous and ample—

But our Lord rectified his judgment by an explicit declaration—

And pointed out the grounds of his duty in an instructive parable—

From the words before us we are led to consider the *extent*, the *reasonableness*, and the *necessity*, of Christian forgiveness

I. The extent

[It does not forbid the execution of human laws, since magistrates are appointed of God on purpose to enforce them^a—

Nor does it prohibit the just exercise of authority in parents or masters—

But it must extend to all offences, however numerous, however heinous^b— — —

And proceed from a heart wholly divested of malice or resentment^c — —

We need not indeed restore to our favour one who *continues* unworthy of it^d—

Or forbear to punish him while he *continues* to merit our displeasure—

But we must pity the offender while we punish the offence—

And seek, in inflicting punishment, both his and the public good—

We must feel towards him as an affectionate parent towards an offending child^e—

We must feel disposed to pray for him, and to cover, rather than expose, his faults^f—

And we must earnestly desire to behold in him such a disposition, as may open a way to perfect reconciliation with him—]

II. The reasonableness

[Every man owes to God a debt that exceeds all calculation— — —

Nor can the debt which any fellow-creature owes to us, bear any proportion to that which we owe to God^g—

Yet we all hope to obtain of God a free remission and forgiveness—

Yea, provided we believe in Christ, our debt is already cancelled—

Should not then a sense of mercy received, incline us to shew mercy?—

Should we “take a fellow-servant by the throat,” when the great Lord of all has spared us?—

Should we rigorously exact a few pence, when we have received a remission of ten thousand talents?—

It would be base indeed not to act towards an offending brother,

^a Rom. xiii. 4

^b “Seventy times seven.”

^c Prov. xxiv. 29.

^d Luke xvii. 3, 4.

^e “From your hearts.”

^f Prov. xxiv. 17, 18.

^g Ten thousand talents amount to above four millions sterling; whereas an hundred pence are somewhat less than three guineas. Doddr. in loc.

brother, as God has acted towards us, when we were enemies and rebels^h—]

III. The necessity

[There is an intimate connexion between the exercise of God's mercy to us, and ours to others—

Though our forgiving of others cannot *merit* forgiveness from God, yet it will certainly be followed by it—

On the other hand, an unmerciful disposition towards others will be the certain means of excluding us from God's favourⁱ—

It will cut us off from the enjoyment of the mercy we *seemed* to have obtained^k—

In uttering the Lord's prayer, we shall even seal our own condemnation^l—

Let us then, if we desire to find mercy in the day of judgment, forgive others, as we hope to be forgiven^m—]

Let us LEARN from hence

1. How to obtain forgiveness for our own offences

[We must not merely ask for patience in hopes of discharging our own debt—

We must rather acknowledge our inability to pay one single mite—

And implore at God's hands a free and complete forgiveness—

We must not however conclude from the parable, that there is no need of the mediation of Christ—

It is through HIM alone that we can derive any blessings from God—

But we must ask for mercy *as a gift*, instead of attempting to make any compensation for our own iniquities—]

2. How to obtain a forgiving temper towards others

[If we know not what we ourselves merit at God's hands, we shall be ready to think much of any injuries which we receive from others—

But if once we become sensible of the greatness of our debt to God, and of the obligations he has laid us under by the free offers of his mercy, we shall feel no difficulty in exercising forbearance and forgiveness—

Resentment cannot long dwell in the bosom of one who has tasted redeeming love—

Let

^h The Jubilee commenced on the day of atonement, to shew that men are then especially bound to exercise mercy, when they themselves have received mercy. Lev. xxv. 9. -

ⁱ Matt. vi. 14, 15. Jam. ii. 13.

^k The parable must not be understood to say, that God revokes his mercy, when he has once really pardoned us. See Rom. xi. 29. Heb. viii. 12.

^l Matt. vi. 12.

^m Col. iii. 12, 13.

Let it then be our study to obtain a thorough knowledge of our own depravity, and to imitate the long-suffering, which we ourselves so richly experience—]

CCXLVIII. THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

Luke x. 30—35. *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out twopence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee.*

MUCH address is necessary in dealing with persons of a captious spirit—

We should speak to them with faithfulness, yet avoid giving them any unnecessary offence—

Our Lord was continually beset with persons of this description—

But in nothing was his divine wisdom more conspicuous than in the answers he gave them—

The parable before us admirably illustrates this observation

I. Explain the parable

We cannot enter into the full meaning of the parable without attending particularly to *the occasion of it*

[A teacher of the law had interrogated our Lord respecting the way to life—

And was desired by our Lord to state what the law required^a—

The lawyer gave a just summary of its requirements, not doubting but that he had fulfilled them all—

Our

^a Ver. 25—29.

Our Lord suggested in reply, that though obedience to the law would entitle him to life, he was little aware of the extent to which that obedience must be carried—

The lawyer (whether from fear of conviction, or confidence of having fulfilled them, we cannot say) passed over the first commandment, and asked for an explanation of the second—

[To convey the desired information, and to correct his self-justifying spirit, our Lord spake this parable—]

The circumstances of the parable deserve also to be noticed

[A Jew is represented to have been robbed and wounded between Jericho and Jerusalem^b—

A priest, and a Levite (thousands of whom dwelt at Jericho) are supposed to have seen him in their way to Jerusalem—

But, though from their very office they were called to exercise compassion, they passed by him without administering any comfort or relief^c—

A Samaritan is then introduced as performing the kindest offices towards him^d—

And as engaging for the whole expence of his maintenance and cure^e—

Thus our Lord shewed, that any person, of whatever nation, or whatever religion, must be esteemed our neighbour—

By his artful statement also, he drew from the lawyer himself an express, though reluctant, acknowledgment of this truth^f—]

But the peculiar suitableness of the parable to the occasion is that which most needs explanation

[The lawyer was manifestly of a proud self-righteous spirit^g—

Though he knew the letter of the law, he was ignorant of its spiritual import—

He

^b This was probable enough, as a desert much infested with robbers lay between them.

^c The latter from curiosity “came and looked on him;” but turned away as the priest had done before him.

^d There was a most inveterate hatred between the Jews and Samaritans (Compare John iv. 9. and viii. 48.) but the minute relation of the circumstances was well calculated to disarm the lawyer’s prejudice.

^e Two-pence was equal to about fifteen-pence of our money, and might be the amount of the expence already incurred; or perhaps might be as much as the Samaritan could spare at that time. His liberality was sufficiently manifest by his engagement to defray the whole sum that might become due.

^f The lawyer, though compelled to give honour to the Samaritan, studiously avoided mentioning his name.

^g Ver. 25.

He supposed that he had merited eternal life by his obedience—

Yet he was far from shewing a loving disposition toward our Lord himself—

The parable opened to him more extensive views of the law—

It shewed him that, so far from having practised his duty, he had not even understood it—

Thus it destroyed at once all his self-righteous hopes—

And, at the same time, inculcated the necessity of practical, and universal benevolence—

Mild as the rebuke was, it could not but convince his judgment—

Yet was it so conveyed that it could not reasonably give offence—]

The parable thus explained, we may now proceed to
II. Improve it

Various are the lessons which this scripture may teach us—

It may very properly lead us to contemplate

1. The folly of self-righteousness

[The law requires us to “love God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves”—

And if we obeyed it perfectly without the smallest defect throughout our whole lives, we might be justified by it—

But who ever loved and served God to the utmost extent of all his faculties and powers?—

Who ever incessantly occupied himself in labours of love towards those who hated and despised him?—

Who has not felt some backwardness to communion with God, and some want of sympathy with his neighbour?—

Yet the law can be satisfied with nothing less than perfect obedience—

It denounces a curse against us if we transgress it in one single instance^h—

Hence we are told that no flesh living can be justified by itⁱ—

Let us then cease to expect life by our own obedience—

Let us for ever shut our mouths and stand guilty before God^k—

Let us acknowledge ourselves to need mercy as much as the apostles^l—

And adopt the language of St. Paul^m—]

2. The

^h Gal. iii. 10.

ⁱ Rom. iii. 20.

^k Rom. iii. 19.

^l Gal. ii. 16.

^m Phil. iii. 8, 9.

2. The true nature of Christian charity

[We are apt to imagine that persons of our own nation, sect, or party, are the proper objects of our love—

But Christian charity extends itself to all mankind—

The distinctions of religion or politics should be forgotten, whenever an object stands in need of our assistance—

And we should sympathize as truly with our bitterest enemy, as with our dearest friend—

Thus did St. Paul compassionate the unbelieving Jewsⁿ—

And our Lord weep over their murderous and devoted city^o—

Let us then endeavour to mortify our narrow, selfish principles—

And to abound in disinterested, self-denying offices of love^p—]

3. The astonishing love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ

[The parable was certainly not intended to represent *his* love—

But it affords us a proper occasion to notice it—

We justly admire the conduct of the benevolent Samaritan—

And the consideration, that his kindness was shewn to a detested Jew, greatly enhances its value—

How then must we admire the love of Christ towards our ruined race!

We were robbed of the image of God in which we were made—

We were left altogether “dead in trespasses and sins”—

No created beings could administer any effectual relief—

But Jesus beheld us lying in our blood^q—

Yet, though we were his enemies, he pitied us^r—

He not only took care of us, but “laid down his life for us”^s—

He has taken upon himself also the whole charge of our cure—

There is nothing that we want, which he has not freely bestowed upon us—

Let us then magnify and adore our generous Benefactor—

While we respect the exercise of love in a fellow creature, let us study to comprehend the unsearchable love of Christ^s—

And let us make his love to us the model of our love to others^t—]

ⁿ Rom. ix. 2, 3.

^o Luke xix. 41.

^p If this were the subject of a *Charity Sermon* it would be proper, in this place, to advert to the particular circumstances of the charity.

^q Ezek. xvi. 6.

^r Rom. v. 6, 8.

^s Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^t John xv. 12.

CCXLIX. THE RICH FOOL.

Luke xii. 20, 21. *But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.*

HEAR we the voice of a gloomy enthusiast, a deluded bigot, or an imperious tyrant?—

Are these reproachful menaces the wild effusions of intemperate zeal?—

No: the text presents to us the just expressions of Jehovah's indignation—

Covetousness, in whomsoever found, cannot fail of provoking his utter abhorrence—

A young man had applied to Jesus to procure him an equitable share of his paternal inheritance—

Our Lord declined any interference, as foreign from the purposes of his mission—

And, knowing the disposition which had assumed the garb of equity, reprov'd it^a—

The parable before us was spoken to enforce that reproof—

And the address of God to the character there delineated, strongly intimated the danger to which the youth himself was exposed—

There are, alas! too many still who are actuated by similar principles^b—

For their conviction we shall enquire,

I. What were the grounds of God's indignation against the rich man?

No evil could attach to the rich man on account of the fruitfulness of his ground—

Nor was he altogether to be blamed for devising prudent means of securing his property—

He should indeed have remembered that there were objects enow around him, whose want should be supplied from his superfluities^c—

But

^a Ver. 13—15.

^b Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

^c It was wrong therefore to think of treasuring up "all his fruits:" perhaps too there was too much anxiety implied in, "What shall I do?"

But his offence principally consisted in two things

1. An idolatrous regard to the world

[He imagined that the world was capable of rendering him happy—

And that the enjoyment of it would be permanent for many years ^d—

But what could be more absurd than such expectations as these?—

Can affluence secure freedom from pain either of body or of mind?—

Can it ward off personal afflictions, or compose domestic troubles?—

Is there more real happiness in palaces than in the humble cottage?—

Does not the experience of Solomon attest the reverse of this ^e?—

And has not our Lord himself affirmed the same ^f?—

But, if wealth were capable of making us happy, can we secure the continuance of it a single day?—

Are not all exposed to such calamities as reduced Job to poverty ^g?—

Is not the instability of riches declared in the strongest terms ^h?—

Or, if they were more stable, can we prolong our own lives?—

Has not the voice of inspiration warned us against any such vain idea ⁱ?—

And did not the event manifest the folly of the rich man's expectations ^k?—

Well then might God address him by that humiliating appellation ^l—

Well might he deride his fruitless anxieties, and delusive hopes ^m—

And justly did he cut him off as a warning to others—]

2. An utter disregard of God

[Amidst his prospects of carnal happiness he had no thoughts of God—

He addressed his soul as though it had no existence beyond the body, nor any capacity superior to the beasts—

Had he regarded God, how different would his speech have been!—

“Soul, thou hast hitherto been too solicitous about the body—

“But

^d Ver. 19.

^e Ver. 15.

^f Prov. xxiii. 5

^g “*This night,*” &c.

^h “*Whose shall those things be,*” &c.

ⁱ Eccl. ii. 11.

^j Job i. 13—19.

^k Jam. iv. 13—15.

^l “*Thou fool.*”

“ But now the body, through the bounty of Providence, is amply provided for—

“ From henceforth therefore banish all anxiety about carnal things—

“ And occupy thyself about thy spiritual and eternal interests—

“ *Thou* shalt now be the one object of my care and attention—

“ And the body shall be altogether devoted to thy service—

“ God hath provided for thee a far richer portion than this world can give—

“ Now therefore set thyself to serve him with all thy faculties and powers—

“ Bless him that he has not “required thee of me” unprepared—

“ And the more time thou hast lost, exert thyself the more to redeem the moments that may still be allotted thee ”—

Such an address would have been a just requital of the divine goodness—

Nor would it ever have brought upon him the judgments experienced—

But such reflections were far enough from his mind—

The bounties of Providence served but to confirm his sensual habits—

And the donor was eclipsed by the very gifts which he bestowed—

Surely then the divine displeasure was not more than adequate to his demerits ?—]

The improvement which our Lord made of this parable leads us to enquire

II. Whether there be not amongst ourselves also similar objects of his displeasure ?

A man anxious about the world and regardless of his soul is a very common character in every place

[To make provision for ourselves and families is by no means sinful ⁿ—

Such prudent care will very well consist with fervent piety ^o—

But our concern about earthly things should not preclude an attention to the soul—

Our first duty is to “lay up treasure in heaven”—

By embracing Christ and his promises we may be “rich in faith”—

And by exerting ourselves in his service we may be “rich in good works”—

Thus, however poor with respect to this world, we may be “rich towards God”—

But

ⁿ 1 Tim. v. 8.

^o Rom. xii. 11.

But how few amongst us make *this* their chief employment!—

How languid is our desire after “Christ’s unsearchable riches,” when compared with our anxiety about the unrighteous mammon!—

How cheerful, constant, and indefatigable is our labour for the body, while that for the soul is at best feeble, occasional, and reluctant!—]

Every such person resembles the rich fool in the parable

1. In his folly

[He shews that he disregards his soul in comparison of his body—

And that the concerns of time appear to him more important than those of eternity—

What can exceed the folly of living in such a state?—

How will such an one, if not stupified by sin, condemn himself in a dying hour!—

How will he stand amazed when he shall appear at the tribunal of God^p!—]

2. In his punishment

[Every worldling indeed is not cut off without a previous warning—

But, whenever he be taken away, he is summoned before God in wrath—

He is torn from the idols which he had cherished in his bosom—

Not the smallest portion of his former comforts is left him—

He is called by an incensed master to give an account of his stewardship—

And for his folly is consigned over to everlasting burnings—]

We cannot CONCLUDE without remarking, *how widely different God’s sentiments are from those of men*

[Men account us wise in proportion as we prosecute our temporal interests^q—

And consider a diligent attention to our eternal welfare as a mark of weakness and folly—

But God forms a very different estimate of human actions—

The amassing of wealth is in his eyes like the “loading oneself with thick clay^r”—

But the laying up treasure in heaven is the very beginning of wisdom^s—

Let us then study to be like-minded with God—

And let us be content to be despised by man if we may but receive a plaudit from our Judge—

Let

^p Wisd. v. 4.

^r Hab. ii. 6.

^q Ps. xlix. 18.

^s Ps. cxi. 10.

Let us not however carry our disregard of the world to a criminal excess—

While we are in the world we should diligently perform the duties of our station^t—

But our first and greatest care should be to obtain an eternal inheritance—

So, whenever our soul shall be required, we shall give it up with joy—

And possess our portion when the vanities of time shall be no more—]

^t 1 Cor. vii. 24.

CCL. THE WATCHFUL SERVANT.

Luke xii. 35—37. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

SUCH is the uncertainty of life, and such the importance of eternal things, that one would suppose every one should feel the necessity of standing ready for death and judgment, even though no injunctions had been given us to that effect—But our Lord frequently insisted on that subject, and, in parables as well as in plainer terms, inculcated the duty of continual watchfulness—In the parable before us he mentions

I. our duty

All of us are servants of one common Lord and Master—He is absent, and has commanded all of us to wait for his return

1. In certain expectation that he will come

[The time of his return is the time of death and judgment—This may be protracted, so that scoffers may say, Where is the promise of his coming^a?—But “he is not slack concerning his promise”—He is only exercising his patience and

^a Ver. 45. with 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

and long-suffering toward the ungodly world^b—And at the expiration of the time allotted them, he will surely come—]

2. In constant readiness to receive him

[This is the more immediate import of the metaphors in the text^c—We should gather in the affections which too often entangle our feet—“*Unite my heart to fear thy name,*” should be our daily prayer—Whatever obstructs us in the way of duty should be put away—Our graces too should be kept in lively exercise—And the one desire of our soul should be, so to have every thing within us regulated according to our Master’s will, that the very instant he shall knock, we may receive him gladly and without fear—]

To enforce the practice of this duty our Lord subjoins

II. Motives to the performance of it

The motives suggested in the parable are of very different kinds

1. Encouraging

[*Thrice* does our Lord pronounce the watchful servant “blessed^d”—Indeed what can be more blessed than to be prepared to meet our God?—To such servants he promises the most exalted honour—We do not indeed conceive that Jesus will repeat in heaven any such act of condescension as he once submitted to on earth^e—But there is no expression of kindness which the meanest servant could manifest to the most beloved Master, which Jesus will not manifest to his faithful servants in heaven—He has prepared the richest banquet for them; and will “feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of waters^f”—And should not this prospect stimulate us to watchfulness? who would not perform the work when they are promised such wages?—]

2. Alarming

[What indignation would a nobleman feel, if, having ordered his servants to be ready for his reception, he should be kept a long time knocking at the door at midnight, and find not a servant awake, or so much as a light in his house!—And will not Jesus be justly indignant, if he shall find such a reception from any one of us?—He tells us that he will

^b 2 Pet. iii. 9.

^c It was the custom to wear long garments, which they girded up when they were about to do any thing that required activity and exertion. And lights or torches were used at their nuptials, which were usually celebrated in the evening.

^d Ver. 37, 38, 43.

^e The Romans waited on their slaves at the feasts of Saturn; but we do not suppose that our Lord alluded to this, because his hearers probably were not acquainted with the fact.

^f Rev. vii. 17.

will scourge that servant with such severity as to “cut him asunder”—And that he will assign him his portion among his open and avowed enemies^g—Nor will he treat in this manner those only who are riotous and debauched, but those also who neglect to prepare for his arrival^h—He will however make a distinction between the punishment of different servants, proportioning the stripes to the opportunities he had afforded them of knowing and doing his willⁱ—But the fewest stripes will be dreadful, and the pain of them eternal—How should such an awful consideration as this awaken us!—Surely our hearts must be harder than adamant, if they be not impressed by it—]

We may IMPROVE this parable

1. For self-examination

[Peter asked whether it related to the disciples?—and our Lord directed them to examine themselves whether they were such servants^k?—This is a proper direction for us—Are we then “like” such servants?— — — Let us remember that to such, and such alone, will our Lord’s advent be a source of joy—To all others, what a terrible surprise will his coming be!—Let us then resolve, with God’s grace, to watch^l—Who would not watch if he knew that his *house* would be assaulted by thieves? And shall we not watch to preserve our *souls*^m?—Whatever be our station among men, our duty to Jesus is the same—O that we may all meet his approbation, and receive his blessing!—]

2. For consolation

[The time of his coming may appear long—But it is only as one or two watches of a single nightⁿ—How soon will this be past!—And how sweet will be our rest at the expiration of it!—Let us then “exercise ourselves unto godliness”—Let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober^o—Let us, as dear fellow-servants, strive to keep each other awake and lively—And soon shall we hear the wished-for knock—Blessed period! May we all be found ready for it; and welcome our divine Master with songs of gratitude and triumph^p—]

^g Ver. 46.

^k Ver. 41, 42.

ⁿ Ver. 38.

^h Ver. 47.

^l Hab. ii. 1.

^o 1 Thess. v. 6.

ⁱ Ver. 48.

^m Ver. 39, 40.

^p Isai. xxv, 9.

CCLI. THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

Luke xiii. 7—9. *Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

PERSONS, who can least bear a scrutiny themselves, are apt to pass the severest censures upon others—

But we can never form a just estimate of men's characters from the dispensations of Providence towards them—

Nor, though our conclusions were more certain, would it become us to place ourselves on the seat of judgment—

We are far more concerned to prepare for the account which we ourselves must render unto God—

Such was the advice which our Lord gave to his censorious hearers—

He bade them repent of their own sins instead of presuming to judge others^a—

And enforced his admonition with an apposite and instructive parable—We shall enquire

I. In what respects we resemble a barren fig-tree

Humiliating as the comparison before us is, it is but too just—

We have enjoyed every advantage that could conduce to fruitfulness

[The fig-tree is represented as planted in a vineyard where the soil was good, and every attention was paid to it—

Thus we have not been left in the open field of the heathen world—

We have been planted in the inclosed vineyard of God's church—

His word and ordinances have been regularly administered to us—

We have participated both the stated and occasional labours of his ministers—

Nor

Nor has any thing been wanting which could render us fruitful—

God may appeal respecting us, as he did respecting his church of old ^b—]

Yet it is to be feared we have hitherto been found barren

[For three successive years was the fig-tree destitute of fruit—

And have not we been barren a much longer time?—

The fruits which God expects are repentance, faith, and obedience ^c—

But have we mourned over our sins with deep contrition?—

Have we fled to Christ as the only refuge and hope of lost sinners?—

Have we presented ourselves to him an holy and living sacrifice?—

Has it been the labour and ambition of our souls to abound in these fruits?—

Have we not even to this hour been “barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ?”—

Have we not rather, as cumberers of the ground, been prejudicial to those around us?—

Have not those who have been planted near us, reason to complain that they have been retarded by us, rather than furthered in the spiritual life?—

Surely too many of us deserve the name once given to Israel of old ^d—]

We may justly wonder therefore that we are suffered to occupy our respective places

II. Whence it is that, notwithstanding our unfruitfulness, we have been spared to this time

We are ready to suppose that mere unprofitableness is no sin—

But we are not spared because our state is not hateful to God

[The owner of the vineyard noticed all the pains bestowed on the fig-tree—

And felt his disappointment greater every successive year—

Hence he spake of its unfruitfulness with astonishment and indignation ^e—

And

^b Isai. v. 4.

^c Matt. iii. 8. Luke xviii. 8. and Phil. i. 11.

^d Hos. x. 1.

^e “Behold—Why,” &c. convey these ideas very forcibly.

And must he not wonder that in the midst of so many advantages we remain unfruitful?—

Has he not declared that unprofitable servants are objects of his abhorrence ^f—]

Much less are we spared because we are better than others

[Doubtless there are degrees of sinfulness and guilt—

As among men, so in the sight of God, there are some worse than others

But what good can be in him who answers no one end of his creation?—

The description given of such persons by the prophet is strictly just ^g—

And to them may be addressed those humiliating words of Moses ^h—]

The intercession of Christ is the true reason of God's forbearance towards us

[The fig-tree was spared only at the request of "the vine-dresser" ⁱ—

The order given would certainly have been executed, if he had not obtained a respite—

And little do we think how often death has had a commission to cut us down—

Surely our continued provocations must often have incensed God against us—

But, in former times, he often revoked his word at the urgent request of his servant Moses ⁱ—

Nor can we doubt but that the Psalmist's declaration has been often verified in our great Advocate and Intercessor ^k—]

The respite however which is yet prolonged, will not last for ever

III. What doom we must expect if we still continue barren

God will deal with every man according to his works—

If now at last we should begin to bear fruit it would be well

[The vine-dresser undertook to bestow still greater culture on the fig-tree—

And intimated that, if his labours should succeed, it would be a source of much satisfaction to all concerned—

How much more is this true in reference to our souls!—

At

^f Matt. xxv. 26, 30.

^g Ezek. xv. 2—4

ⁱ Exod. xxxii. 10, 11, 14.

^h Deut. ix. 4—6.

^k Ps. cvi. 23.

At this moment we may consider the trench digging and the manure applied to us—

What a source of comfort will it be, if your means be blessed with success!—

The owner of the vineyard, the dresser of it, yea, and the inferior labourers too, would greatly rejoice!—

And what a blessing would it be to the tree itself!—

Instead of being cut down as useless, it would be an ornament to the vineyard—

God himself would not disdain to regale himself with its fruit^m—

In due season it should be transplanted to that richer vineyard above—

And should bring forth fruit to God's glory for evermore—

Yes, its past unfruitfulness should be no obstruction to its bliss—

But joy and honour should be its everlasting portion—]

But if the culture be still in vain, we must be speedily cut down

[The intercessor himself approved of this in reference to the fig-tree—

And can any thing else be expected by those whom the gospel does not profit?—

Can any think that they shall be left to cumber the ground for ever?—

Must not even the patience of God himself be at last exhausted?—

Shall he not ere long definitively say, CUT THEM DOWN?—

Must they not *then* be consigned over to everlasting burnings?—

And must not their Intercessor, yea, their own souls, approve the sentence?—

Let every one then attend to the warning given to the antediluvian worldⁿ—

And not defer till the morrow, what, if left undone, must involve him in such ruin—]

INFER

1. How thankful should we be to our great Advocate and Intercessor!

[Many since the last year have been cut off by death—

What a mercy should we esteem it that *we* have been spared!—

How dreadful must our state have now been if we had been taken unprepared!—

We

¹ Luke xv. 5, 6, 7, 10.

^m Cant. iv. 16.

ⁿ Gen. vi. 3.

We should have been irrevocably doomed to dwell with the fallen angels—

Nor should we ever have heard one more offer of mercy from our offended God—

Let us then bless and adore our Lord for this distinguishing favour —

And let his love constrain us to turn unto him with our whole hearts °—]

2. How earnest should we be in improving the present moment!

[Many are dead who lately seemed as likely to live as ourselves—

But when their time was come they could not resist the stroke of death—

Nor can any who are now alive, tell how long a respite shall be granted them—

It is probable that many of us will be gone before the expiration of this year ^p—

And whenever the fixed period shall arrive, all intercessions will be in vain—

Let us then redeem the time with all earnestness and zeal—

And accomplish the great work, before the night cometh to terminate our labours—]

° 2 Pet. i. 5—8.

^p Perhaps one in twenty.

CCLII. THE AMBITIOUS GUEST.

Luke xiv. 7—10. *And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

THE Christian is not prohibited from occasionally joining in carnal festivity—

But he should carefully watch his own spirit and conduct when he ventures upon such dangerous ground—

And

And should improve his intercourse with worldly company for the spiritual edification of himself and others—

Our blessed Lord was sometimes present at feasts; but his conversation at those seasons was always pious and instructive—

The things which occurred never failed to furnish him with abundant matter for useful observation—

Having noticed at a wedding the indecent ambition of the guests, he animadverted on their conduct in the parable before us—

I. The principle here inculcated

Our Lord did not intend these words merely as *a maxim* for the regulating of our conduct in one particular, but as *a parable* that should be applied to the whole of our deportment in social life—

The scope of the text, whether as originally delivered by Solomon, or as quoted and applied by our Lord, is to recommend humility^a—

But to enter fully into its meaning, we must analyse, as it were, the principle here inculcated; which implies

1. A deep sense of our own unworthiness

[If we stand high in our own estimation, we cannot but expect a degree of homage from others—

And shall be ready to claim precedence among our equals—

But if we have an humiliating sense of our own extreme vileness, we shall readily concede pre-eminence to others, and take the lowest place, as that which properly belongs to us—

Such a disposition cannot but spring from self-knowledge; nor can it fail of operating in this manner^b—]

2. An utter contempt of worldly distinctions

[While we “love that honour which cometh of man,” we cannot but aspire after it, when it comes within our reach—

But we are taught to be dead, yea crucified to the world^c—

And this once obtained, we shall despise the baubles that are so much the objects of rivalry and contention—]

3. A readiness to give honour to whom honour is due

[Though religion teaches us an indifference to man's applause, it does not warrant us to level the established orders of society—

God requires us to “honour those that are in authority,” as well as to serve and honour him^d—

While

^a Compare Prov. xxv. 6, 7, with ver. 11.

^c Gal. vi. 14.

^b Phil. ii. 3.

^d Rom. xiii. 7.

While therefore a sense of duty will keep us from coveting human distinctions for ourselves, it will induce us cheerfully to pay to others the tribute due to their rank and station—]

Excellent however as this principle is, it needs to be limited by prudence, and exercised with care

[Though this principle can never operate to too great an extent, it may exert itself in a very absurd manner—

There are certain decencies in society that ought not to be violated, as would be the case if the great and noble should literally take the lowest place among those who are of very inferior rank—

Besides, it is possible that we may be actuated by pride, while we thus put on an appearance of humility—

We need therefore take heed both to our hearts and ways, that in obeying this precept we act with sincerity and discretion—]

Having endeavoured to explain the principle, we shall point out

II. Its importance in human life—

Humility is to the graces of a Christian what holiness is to the attributes of the Deity, the beauty and perfection of them all—

1. It conduces in the highest degree to the comfort of mankind

[Nothing tends more to *the happiness of our own minds*—

What a source of vexation and anguish is pride!—

With what envy are they beheld to whom precedence has been given!—

What indignation do they excite, who overlook our superior claims^e!—

A slight, whether real or supposed, will often fill us with rancour as much as the most serious injury could have done—

But let humility possess our minds, and this source of uneasiness is destroyed—

If we be willing to give honour to others, and be indifferent to it ourselves, and especially if we count ourselves unworthy of it, we shall feel no pain at seeing others preferred before us—

Nor does any thing more tend to *the peace and comfort of society*—

What is it but pride that makes every *neighbourhood* a scene of contention^f?—

What

* This idea will be fully understood by those who have ever mixed in public assemblies.

^f James iii. 14—16.

What is it but pride that creates such factions in a *state*?—

What is it but pride that involves *nations* in war and desolation?—

Even the *church* of God itself is often torn and distracted by this fatal principle—

Let humility once gain a proper ascendant in the hearts of men, and universal harmony will reign—

Surely the importance of this principle cannot be too highly rated, or expressed in too energetic terms—]

2. It is that whereby men most eminently adorn the gospel

[The avowed scope of the gospel is to improve the principles and practice of mankind—

And they who receive the truth, are expected to excel in every thing that is amiable and praiseworthy—

How unseemly did the ambition of the sons of Zebedee appear^h!—

The ungodly themselves do not hesitate to pronounce them hypocrites who, while they profess religion, are under the dominion of pride and ambition—

On the other hand, humility irresistibly commends itself to all—

Who does not admire the concessions made by Abraham to his nephew Lotⁱ?—

Who does not adore the condescension of our Lord in washing his disciples' feet^k?—

Even those who are most elated with pride themselves, are constrained to applaud humility in others—

And though nothing but the grace of God can induce any to embrace the gospel, a suitable deportment in its professors will often silence the cavils, and disarm the prejudices, of those who ignorantly reject it^l—]

This subject will naturally lead us to CONTEMPLATE

1. The folly of sin

[There is really as much *folly*, as there is *sinfulness*, in sin—

In how many instances do men attain by integrity and humility, what others in vain seek for by dishonesty and arrogance!—

This is well illustrated in the parable before us—

Let us then simply endeavour to glorify God by an holy conversation—

And leave our temporal advancement to his all-wise disposal—]

2. The

^z James iv. 1.

^h Matt. xx. 20—28.

ⁱ Gen. xiii. 9.

^k John xiii. 4, 5.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 13—15.

2. The excellence of religion

[Religion does not merely impose rules for our conduct towards God, but should regulate every disposition of our minds, and every action of our lives—

Where it has its full influence, it gives a polish, which is but poorly mimicked by the refinements of modern politeness—

It will not indeed convert a clown into a courtier; but it will teach every one to act as becomes his station—

Let us then exhibit in our respective spheres that simplicity of mind and manners, that, while it adorns the gospel, shall disarm the malice of our enemies, and, if possible, conciliate their esteem^m—]

^m Rom. xii. 10. 1 Pet. v. 5.

CCLIII. THE GREAT SUPPER.

Luke xiv. 16—18. *Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse.*

PERSONS, who are very ignorant of true religion, often express a desire to participate its blessings—

Wherever we find them thus open to instruction, we should endeavour to teach them the way of God more perfectly—

This was the uniform practice of our blessed Saviour^a—

The person, that addressed our Lord, seemed but little acquainted with the nature of the Messiah's kingdom^b—

Our Lord took occasion to rectify his apprehensions on that subject—

And to shew him, under the idea of a feast, that the provisions of his gospel would be slighted by that whole nation—

The parable in this view declares the rejection of the Jews and the call of the Gentiles—

But it is also applicable to nominal Christians in all ages—

Its

^a See John iv. 15, 21. and vi. 34, 35.

^b Ver. 15.

Its import, as it respects us, may be comprised in two observations

I. God invites us to partake of the blessings of his gospel

The gospel dispensation is fitly compared to a sumptuous feast

[In feasts every thing is set forth that can gratify the palate—

Thus in the gospel there is every thing that can administer delight or vigour to the soul—

There is pardon for all the sins that we have ever committed—

There is strength against all the corruptions or temptations that can assail us—

There is communion with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—

There are foretastes and earnestes of the heavenly glory—

On these accounts the prophets also spake of it under the image of a feast^c—]

God sends his servants to invite men to his table

[The first persons that were invited to it were the Jews—

Upon their rejection of the gospel the Gentiles were to be called in^d—

The invitation to us Gentiles is still continued—

The servants of God are sent to *hasten* your tardy steps—

We are to inform you, that “all things are now ready,” and, as it were, waiting for you^e—

We are moreover to *urge* you to accept the invitation—^f

We are to take, as it were, no denial from you^f—

Such is God’s desire to bless us with all spiritual blessings—]

Nor are any, however mean or abandoned, to be overlooked

[We are to go and call people of all ranks and descriptions—

We are to search out the persons most distant, most obscure, most impious^g—

We

^c Isai. xxv. 6.

^d Rom. xi. 11.

^e The blood, which is to cleanse you, is already shed: the Spirit, that is to renew you, is already poured out: God is reconciled and is ready to receive you: nothing is wanting, but that you come and fill the place prepared for you.

^f It is the force of persuasion which we are to use; not the force of penal statutes: such compulsion as that, is as abhorrent from reason as it is from religion.

^g This seems intimated by the ~~streets and lanes of the city, and the highways and hedges without the city.~~

We are to bring them in, however labouring under infirmities of body, or distress of soul^h—

God will have his “house to be filled”—

Nor are his servants to desist from their labours till that work be accomplished—

And, thanks be to God! “there yet is room” for more—]

One would suppose that such rich blessings would meet with universal acceptance: but

II. We ungratefully reject them with vain and frivolous excuses

Few find any inclination to accept the invitations of the gospel

[The Jews in their day withstood the solicitation of the apostles—

So now, all, however importuned, “begin to make excuse”—

Some plead the importance of their earthly business—

Others urge that they must attend to the concerns of their families—

Thus, earthly cares, or carnal ease and pleasure, stupify the world—]

But God will resent the contempt poured upon his mercy

[The pleas urged in the parable are not sinful in themselves—

But nothing, however good, should keep us from attending to the one thing needful—

Every concern becomes sinful, when it is inordinately followed—

Hence God declares that he is “angry” with those who offer such pleas—

He threatens that they shall never partake of the feast they so despise—

Nor even “taste” of his bounty to all eternity—

“None,” however attentive to their worldly callings, shall find an exception in their favour—

How awful their state, who are never to *taste* of pardon, peace, or glory!—

May we never bring upon ourselves so terrible a doom!—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are averse to accept the invitations of the gospel

[Every one is forward to offer pleas in extenuation of his guilt—

And,

^h “The poor, the halt,” &c. may refer to their spiritual as well as temporal condition.

And, while some civilly beg to be excused, others roughly answer "I cannot come"—

But whatever be our plea, and in what way soever it be offered, God will discern its fallacy—

Indeed the very persons who refuse our invitations, know that their excuses will avail nothing in the day of judgmentⁱ—

What folly then is it to offer *that* in justification of ourselves now, which will serve only to condemn us in the last day!—

Let us no longer cherish such fatal delusions—

We may give to the world and our family a due portion of our care—

But let nothing keep us from the feast which God has prepared—]

2. Those who are *afraid* to come at the bidding of their Lord

[Many are kept from Christ by an apprehension of their own unworthiness—

They think it would be presumption in them to accept his invitation—

But it is not possible to describe more clearly the persons invited—

If we be poor, or halt, or maimed, or blind, we are expressly called—

Nor is our distance or unworthiness any ground of exclusion—

Let none then yield to unbelieving fears—

We would "compel" you all, by every argument we can devise—

Reflect on the greatness of the host that invites you, and the excellence of the feast he sets before you—

Consider the blessedness of partaking of it, and the certain consequences of absenting yourselves from it^k—

Let all come, and "delight their souls with fatness"—

The command given to the church is yet addressed to you^l—]

ⁱ "I *can* not," and "I *will* not," will then be found to have meant the same thing.

^k If the Sacrament be administered, it may be observed, that the table is now spread before their eyes, &c. ^l Cant. v. i.

CCLIV. THE FOOLISH BUILDER AND THE INCONSIDERATE KING.

Luke xiv. 28—33. *Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it, begin*

begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand, to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

MANKIND in general, when they want us to engage in their pursuits, are apt to exaggerate the advantages, and to hide as much as possible the difficulties, that will attend the adoption of their plans—Our Lord on the contrary declared plainly to his followers the conflicts they must engage in, and the losses they must sustain, if they would be his disciples—In the verses preceding the text, he states in very strong language the only terms on which he would admit them into his family; and having cautioned them by two familiar parables against engaging rashly in his service, he again reminds them, that they must forsake all if they will follow him—To elucidate the passage, we shall consider

I. The scope of the parables

Both of them have the same general tendency to guard men against an hasty and inconsiderate profession of religion—But

The former points out the folly of such conduct

[Every one sees, that a builder, who through a neglect to count the cost, should be compelled to leave his structure unfinished, would be universally derided as a foolish man—But incomparably greater is his folly who begins to follow Christ, and afterwards by his apostasy shews, that he had never duly considered how much was requisite to make us Christians indeed—The very people who have turned him aside, will be the first to deride him for his instability; and while they reverence him who maintains a firm and consistent conduct, they will despise in their hearts the man who proves unfaithful to his God—The saints indeed will not “mock him,” because they know what a “fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God;” but they will pity him, as a poor infatuated creature, who has “left off to behave himself wisely,” and reduced himself by his folly to the extremest misery—Nor is it long ere he himself will see his folly in its true light; when he will behold afar off that heaven upon which he turned his back, and inherit that portion which he so thoughtlessly preferred—]

The latter leads us rather to contemplate the *danger* of such conduct

[A king who should inconsiderately plunge himself into a war with an enemy that was too powerful for him, would expose both his kingdom and his life to the most imminent danger—Thus it is also with a man who commences a warfare with sin and satan without knowing how he shall make head against them: for as an hasty profession of religion exposes him to self-deception, so an hasty dereliction of it will subject him to the heavier condemnation—It is true that all must perish who do not enlist under the banners of Christ; but it is equally true, that cowardly soldiers, who forsake their standard, are far more guilty than if they had never been enrolled upon his list: “It is better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from it;” their end is worse than their beginning; and they shall be punished with more stripes in proportion to the advantages they have enjoyed, and the professions they have made—]

These parables will afford still further instruction, if we consider

II. Our Lord's improvement of them

Our Lord did not amuse his hearers with speculative truths, but brought them home to their conscience by a direct and personal application

1. We must count the cost

[Here the cost is plainly told us; “We must forsake all;” that is, forsake all *comparatively* in respect of affection, and *absolutely*, whenever it stands in competition with our duty; nor, if we refuse these terms, can we be his disciples—We are not indeed to cast away our possessions at all events; but so to withdraw our affections from them, as to be willing to resign them whenever the retaining of them shall be inconsistent with our allegiance to him—This we ought to weigh in our minds, and to consider whether the benefits of religion be sufficient to counterbalance its trials—We must be ready to part with our reputation, our interest, our carnal ease and pleasures, our friends, our liberty, our life; but in return for them we may expect, “the honour that cometh of God,” “the riches of Christ that are unsearchable,” “the pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore;” we shall even now possess that “peace which passeth all understanding,” together with the liberty of the sons of God; and soon we shall inherit eternal life and glory in his more immediate presence—We should dispassionately balance these against each other, that we may see which scale preponderates, and whether the pearl be worth the price demanded for it—]

2. We

2. We must pay it without reluctance

[All have not the same trials to endure; but all will meet with some which shall prove a test of their sincerity—Whenever, or in whatever degree, we be tried, we must shew our decided purpose, our fixed determination—We must “*hate*” (that is, we must esteem as worthless and of no account) our nearest friends, our dearest interests, yea, our very lives, when they stand in competition with our duty to God—Nothing must tempt us to draw back from him—If once we draw the sword, we must throw away the scabbard—If we slay not our spiritual enemies, they will destroy us—We must “*endure to the end if ever we would be saved*”—On the other hand, we have every encouragement to “*war a good warfare* ;” for, if we go forth in the strength of the Lord God, we shall be “*more than conquerors through him that loved us*”—]

We conclude with an ADDRESS to

1. The inconsiderate Christian

[Men promise at their baptism that they will renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil; but never afterwards think of fulfilling so much as one of their engagements—They expect wages without work, and victory without a conflict—But such conduct will expose them to “*everlasting shame and contempt*,” and will ultimately involve them in irrecoverable ruin—Let it be remembered then, that, as it is no easy matter to be a Christian, so nothing but real Christianity will be of any avail—If we accept not salvation on the terms which God has prescribed, it is in vain to hope that we shall ever participate the blessings it affords—]

2. The mistaken Christian

[It is too common to imagine that we can retain the friendship of the world, and preserve at the same time our fidelity to Christ—But we are plainly warned to the contrary—Our Lord elsewhere assures us that we cannot serve God and mammon—And St. James affirms the friendship of the world to be enmity with God; and that whosoever desires to be the friend of the world, he is thereby constituted the enemy of God^a—Would to God that this were more considered!—But many, because they make some sacrifices, suppose that they come up to the terms which Christianity demands, when, in fact, they retain their bosom lusts, and sacrifice only those, which their change of situation, or their more advanced age, has rendered less importunate—Instead of being jealous of their own sincerity, they are over-confident: and instead of being filled with shame and sorrow on account of their defects, they are ever pleading for indulgence, and labouring

^a Jam. iv. 4.

labouring to persuade themselves that they come up to the mark prescribed to them in the scriptures—Let such persons beware, lest, while they value themselves on their more liberal and enlarged sentiments, they deceive their own souls, and be found wanting in the day of final retribution—If when Christ calls them to forsake *all*, they are striving to forsake as little as possible, they have good reason to fear that they have not the mind which was in Christ Jesus—]

3. The timid Christian

[Many, when the hour of trial comes, are ready to faint and draw back—But what are our trials when compared with those of thousands who have gone before us? We have not yet resisted unto blood—Besides, have we not been told repeatedly, that if we have no cross we must not expect a crown?—Let us recollect, that, “if we turn back, God’s soul shall have no pleasure in us;” and, that the whole world will be a poor exchange for an immortal soul—“As soldiers we must expect to endure hardness”—Let us then “be strong and very courageous:” let us “fight the good fight, and quit ourselves like men”—And let us reflect for our encouragement, that, though our “enemies may encompass us like bees,” “there are more for us than against us”—]

4. The steadfast Christian

[Have any ever found cause to regret that they endured the cross? Will any complain they ever suffered too much for Christ?—Has not a rich reward been invariably enjoyed by them in the testimony of their own conscience, and in the consolations of God’s Spirit? Yea, whatever they have suffered, have they not had “an hundredfold more given them even in this present life; and will they not have life everlasting also in the world to come?”—Surely the intrepid Christian has “chosen the good part; nor shall it ever be taken away from him”—Go on then, “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus”—“See that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought; but that ye receive a full reward”—“Be faithful unto death, and God shall give you a crown of life”—]

CCLV. THE LOST SHEEP.

Luke xv. 3—7. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when*
he

he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven, over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

THERE is nothing more injurious to ourselves or others than prejudice—

While it operates as a bar to our own improvement, it leads us to put a perverse construction on every thing we see or hear—

It will extract matter for censure even from the most innocent or laudable actions—

The malignity of it cannot be seen in more striking colours than in the conduct of the Pharisees towards our Lord—

He conversed familiarly with the most abandoned sinners for their good—

Such condescension ought to have been regarded with the highest approbation—

But it provoked only the spleen and malice of the haughty Pharisees—

Our Lord however took the best method of silencing their murmurs—

By appealing to their own consciences he forced them to condemn themselves—

We shall consider

I. The parable

The scope of the parable is, not so much to mark the resemblance between a sinner and a lost sheep, as between our Lord and a faithful shepherd—

The parallel between them will appear, if we consider

1. A shepherd's concern for his sheep when lost

[Though a man had ninety-nine others, he would not be indifferent about the loss of one—

If he missed one, he would immediately begin to make enquiries about it—

He would not expect it ever to trace back its steps unto the fold again—

If he gained intelligence respecting it, he would go in quest of it—

Leaving the rest in the pasture^a, he would seek diligently till he found it—

And

^a The Jews called all ground which was not arable, The wilderness.

And the more it was in danger of being devoured by wolves, the more assiduously would he exert himself for its recovery—

Such is the conduct of our Lord towards our ruined race—

We all are fitly compared to sheep wandering from the fold ^b—

Never do we think of “returning to the great Shepherd of our souls”—

We are every moment exposed to the assaults of a devouring lion ^c—

Our compassionate Shepherd came from heaven itself to seek us—

His solicitude for us is well delineated by an inspired prophet ^d—

He moreover sends his servants into every part of the world—

By his word and spirit he endeavours to apprehend us—

Nor does he account any labour too great, if he may but succeed at last—

Though he has myriads in his fold above, he cannot endure to lose one—

Nor, while so much as one of his sheep are wandering from him, will he relax his endeavours to bring it back—]

2. His joy over it when recovered

[When a shepherd has found his lost sheep he seizes it with his crook—

The more it struggles for liberty, the more he labours to secure it—

Rather than lose it again he brings it back upon his shoulders—

Exulting in his success he announces it to every one he meets—

And receives with pleasure the congratulations of his friends—

Do we not here also see the benevolence of our blessed Lord?—

Having apprehended us by his grace, he overcomes our resistance—

Having prospered in his labour, he regrets not the pains he has bestowed—

He is satisfied with all the travail of his soul when he beholds us safe—

With joy he brings us to the society of his peculiar people—

And calls on them also to rejoice together with him—

This is beautifully described by the pen of inspiration ^e—

And gloriously realized in every quarter of the globe—]

Our Lord himself elucidates the parable by suggesting

II. The

^b Isai. liii. 6.

^d Ezek. xxxiv. 11—16.

^c 1 Pet. v. 8.

^e Zeph. iii. 17.

II. The improvement of it

Nothing could be more pertinent than this parable to the occasion on which it was delivered—

“Repentance” is properly represented as the return of the soul to God

[While we remain impenitent we are afar off from God—

We wander further and further from the path of life—

But in repentance we are made to see our guilt and danger—

We gladly embrace the mercy offered to us in the gospel—

And give up ourselves to God to be governed by his will, and be saved by his grace—]

Hence the repentance of sinners becomes a matter of joy to all the holy angels

[Whether the glorified saints take any interest in our welfare we know not—

But we are sure that angels are not unconcerned spectators of us^f—

They greatly delight both in God’s glory, and our good—

The perseverance of established saints is a permanent source of happiness to them—

But the conversion of a sinner fills them with more abundant joy^g—

The more desperate his condition had appeared, the more exquisite is the delight they feel in his recovery^h—

Even “in the presence of God” himself they are attracted by this sight—

Not all the glory of the godhead can divert their attention from it—

Nor all the felicity of heaven indispose them for rejoicing in it—

However strange this idea may seem, it is truly scriptural—

Nothing can be plainer than the affirmation in the textⁱ—

Nor can we doubt it without greatly dishonouring the character of Christ^k—]

In this view the repentance of men should excite joy in us also

[This, though not expressed, is evidently implied in the words of our text—

The chief scope of the parable was to reprove the envious spirit of the Pharisees—

And

^f Heb. i. 14.

^g They who need no repentance, are those, who having been converted to God, need not *μετανοίαν*, an entire change of mind, but only to be confirmed in their present views, and to be rendered conformable to them.

^h So Jacob on account of his son Joseph, Gen. xlv. 26—28. and xlvi. 30.

ⁱ See also ver. 10.

^k “The faithful witness.” Rev. i. 5.

And what could so forcibly condemn it as the contrast here exhibited?—

Does Christ rejoice at the return of a sinner, and shall we repine?—

Do all the angels in heaven exult at such a sight, and shall we make it an occasion of offence?—

Are we then indeed better judges of what is good than they?—

Or do we well to oppose what they so desire to see accomplished?—

Let us take heed lest we be found at last to have “fought against God”—

Let us rather encourage others both by precept and example—

Let us adore our Saviour for his condescension and grace toward sinful man—

And let that, which was urged as an objection against him, be the greatest commendation of him to our souls¹—]

ADDRESS

[While some are turning unto God, others are striving to draw them back—

But let *those, who have scoffed at religion*, confess their folly—

And *those, who have discouraged repentance in others*, repent of their iniquity—

On the other hand, let *the humble penitent* go to God with confidence—

Who can read this parable and doubt Christ's willingness to save him?—

If there were but *one* penitent amongst us all, the angels would rejoice over him—

How then would they shout for joy if we ALL began to implore mercy!—

Our past iniquities would rather enhance than diminish their glorying on our account^m—

Let not those therefore, whose cases appear most hopeless, despond—

Let them forbear to trample any longer on the Saviour's love—

Let it be their ambition to give joy to those whom they have so often grieved—

Thus also shall they join in the general chorus at the last day—

And ascribe the “glory to him who loved them, and gave himself for themⁿ”—]

¹ Ver. 2.

^m Not because they take pleasure in sin, but because they regard us as brands plucked out of the fire.

ⁿ Rev. i. 5; 6.

CCLVI. THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

Luke xv. 8—10. *What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.*

THERE is nothing in which we are so deeply interested as the extent and riches of the Redeemer's grace—

His familiar converse with Publicans and sinners affords the richest encouragement to us, when we are bowed down under a sense of guilt—

His condescension towards them indeed excited only disgust in the proud Pharisees—

But Jesus was the more careful to vindicate the conduct which they condemned—

And in repeated parables assured them, that it was the joy of his heart to save even the vilest of mankind—

The parable of the lost piece of money very nearly resembles that which precedes it—

Nevertheless it suggests many useful thoughts which are appropriate to itself—

Its import may be unfolded under the following observations

I. There are none so worthless but the Lord is deeply concerned about them

The woman expressed very great anxiety about the piece of silver she had lost

[The piece of silver was but of very trifling value in itself^a—

Yet she felt much solicitude about it in her mind—

Nor was she content to lose it, notwithstanding she had several others left—]

Thus is our blessed Lord concerned about the souls of men

[In some points of view the soul is undoubtedly of great value—

Nor

^a About 7½ d.

Nor can the whole world itself be put in competition with it—

But to Jesus the souls of men are not of the smallest importance—

If they were righteous, their goodness could not extend to him^b—

They could never profit him, nor add to his happiness^c—

If all that ever existed were annihilated, he would suffer no loss—

If men were necessary to his honour or happiness, he could create millions in an instant—

But the souls of men are inexpressibly vile and guilty in his sight—

Till they have been washed in his blood, they are exposed to his wrath and indignation—

Nor is it any thing but his marvellous compassion that preserves them from everlasting destruction^d—

Nevertheless he is greatly concerned about the loss even of one amongst them—

Though he has myriads that are now safely lodged in his hands, he cannot rest satisfied about those that are yet in danger—

By the prophets he expressed his deep regret for those that perished^e—

In the days of his flesh he wept over the most abandoned of the human race^f—

And to this hour he is grieved at the thought of any dying in their sins^g—]

Nor is his concern for them expressed only by inactive wishes

II. There are no exertions, however great, which he will not use for their recovery

The woman is represented as doing every thing which could be devised for the recovery of her lost piece of silver

[She instantly lighted a candle, that she might search in every dark corner of her house—

She moreover swept her house, that, if it were hid under any dirt or rubbish, she might find it—

Nor did she relax her endeavours till they were crowned with success—

What more could she have done if the lost money had been of the greatest value?—]

Thus

^b Ps. xvi. 2.

^d Lam. iii. 22.

^f Luke xix. 41.

^c Job xxii. 2, 3.

^e Jer. xliii. 27. Hos. xi. 8.

^g 2 Pet. iii. 9.

Thus our Lord uses all possible means for the recovery of lost souls

[Were we lying in utter darkness? he has brought the light of his gospel—

This light he has sent into all the darkest corners of the earth^h—

In the days of his flesh he used all diligence himself—

Since that time he has commissioned his servants to go into all the world—

He has enjoined them to “be instant in their work, in season and out of season”—

He has even threatened that, if one perish through their negligence, he will “require his blood at their hands”—

He has moreover sent his spirit to aid them in their endeavours—

And to search the very inmost recesses of our benighted souls—

However fruitless their exertions may have been, they are never to give up any for lost, as long as there is a possibility of their being found—

May he not well say, “What could I have done more for them than I have doneⁱ?”—

If he appeals to us about the conduct of a woman who had lost her money, how much more may he appeal to us respecting his own conduct!—]

When his labours are successful, then his kindness appears in its brightest colours

III. There is nothing so pleasing to him as the recovery of one from his lost state

The woman is represented as inviting all her neighbours to rejoice with her

[The cause of her joy seems very inadequate to such expressions of it—

But women are apt to be strongly affected with small things—

Her whole property also being small, she may be supposed to feel the more at the recovery of that part which had been in danger—

And the circumstance of its having been lost would render the subsequent possession of it more pleasant—]

Thus our Lord and all the angels in heaven rejoice over a repenting sinner

[This is the main scope of this parable, as well as of that which precedes, and that which follows it—

Hence

^h Isai. ix. 2.

ⁱ Isai. v. 4.

Hence it is strongly marked in every one of the parables—
We must not therefore omit it, or think the repetition of it tedious—

Our Lord well knows the misery of a soul that perishes in sin—

The angels too are doubtless well informed on this subject—

Were it never to be sensible of its loss there would be the less reason to regret it—

But if not put among the treasures of God it must be for ever miserable—

To prevent this is the joy and delight of our blessed Saviour—

For this he came down from heaven, assumed our nature, and died upon the cross—

For this he is dispensing to us continually his word and spirit—

The effecting of this is the consummation of all his wishes and purposes—

Hence, however inadequate a cause of joy this may seem, he accounts it his highest honour and happiness—

He is “satisfied with the travail of his soul” when one that was lost is found—

And all the angels that surround his throne rejoice together with him—

As all hell is moved with triumph at the condemnation of one sinner^k, so does all heaven exult in the exaltation of one to happiness and glory—]

INFER

1. How strange is it that men should have so little regard for their own souls!

[The generality of men are as careless of their souls as if they were of no value—

But should we disregard that which the Son of God seeks with so much anxiety?—

Should we be so indifferent about our own happiness, when all the angels of heaven would shout for joy at the prospect of it?—

Let us never be satisfied with being immersed in darkness and wickedness—

Let us rather be ambitious to have a place among the Lord's treasures—

And let us be thankful that, though lost, we are not yet lost beyond recovery—]

2. How blessed are the effects of a faithful administration of the gospel!

[It

^k Isai. xiv. 9, 10.

[It is by the gospel that Jesus comes to search for lost sinners—

If indeed it be delivered only in a general way it will scarcely ever prove effectual for men's salvation—

It is only the close *application* of the word, that will ever reach the conscience—

But, when faithfully preached, and accompanied with God's spirit, it will find out men in their darkest recesses—

O that God may now make use of it to sweep away the rubbish under which we have lien!—

And that we may be found of him, before he "sweep us away with the besom of destruction!"—]

3. What reason have we to adore the condescension and grace of Christ!

[If he did not seek for us we should lie in our sins to all eternity—

And when found at the last day, that word would be verified in us¹—

What kindness then is it in him to use such means for our recovery!—

Let us never forget what obligations we owe to him—

Let us acknowledge ourselves *his*, that he may do with us as he will—

He will then keep us that we may not fall from him any more^m—

And will lodge us safely in his coffers amidst the treasures he has been collecting from the foundation of the worldⁿ—]

¹ Jer. vi. 30.

^m John x. 28. 1 Pet. i. 5.

ⁿ Eph. i. 10, 14. Mal. iii. 17.

CCLVII. THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke xv. 23, 24.—*Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

THE willingness of God to receive sinners is abundantly declared in scripture—

But in no place is it so amply, or so beautifully described as in the parable before us—

The reference which the parable has to the Jews and Gentiles will be more properly noticed, when we come to consider the conduct of the elder brother—

At present we may view it as a lively representation of a sinner's return to God—

The text leads our attention to three points (which are also the three distinguishing parts of the parable) namely, the prodigal's departure from his father, his return to him, and his reception with him—

I. His departure

He went from his father's house, little thinking of the ruin he should bring upon himself

[The *occasion* of his departure was, that he hated the restraint of his father's presence—

And longed for independence, that he might gratify his own inclinations—

Hence he desired his father to divide him his portion—

But little did he think to what *extent* his passions would carry him—

Scarcely had he received his portion before he left his father—

And departed to a distant country, where his actions would pass unnoticed—

Having thus thrown the reins upon the neck of his appetites, he was carried on with irresistible impetuosity—

From one degree of sin to another he rushed forward without restraint—

Nor stopped till he had wasted his substance in riotous living—

At last he began to feel the *consequences* of his folly—

He was reduced to a state of extreme wretchedness—

Yet he determined to do any thing rather than return to his father—

Though a Jew, he submitted for hire to the ignominious employment of feeding swine—

His wages however, there being a grievous famine in the land, would not procure him even necessary subsistence—

In vain did he attempt to fill his belly with the husks intended for the swine—

In vain did he solicit assistance from those who had known him in his more prosperous days—

“No man,” either from gratitude or compassion, “gave him” any relief—]

Such is the departure of sinners from the presence of their God

[They have experienced the restraints of education—

But have sighed for liberty and independence—

With their growing years, they increasingly abuse the mercies which God has bestowed upon them—

Their

Their reason, their time, and other talents, they employ in the service of sin—

Though they do not all run to the same excess of riot, they live equally at a distance from God—

At last perhaps they begin to feel the misery which their neglect of him has brought upon them—

His providence too concurs with his grace to make a deeper wound in their conscience—

But they try any carnal expedients rather than return to God—

Nor can ever be prevailed on to turn unto him, till they have fully proved the insufficiency of the creature to afford them help—

Whatever they may think of themselves in such a state, they are really “*dead,*” and “*lost*”—]

But the prodigal was not gone beyond recovery, as is evident from

II. His return

During his departure he had been as a person destitute of reason—

At last however, “*coming to himself,*” he thought of his father’s house—

The various steps of his return are worthy of notice

[He first reflected on the folly and madness of his former ways—

And on the incomparably happier state of those who lived under his father’s roof, and whom perhaps he once despised for submitting to such restraints—

He then resolved that he would return to his father, and implore his forgiveness—

Having formed the purpose, he instantly arose to carry it into execution—

And set off, destitute as he was, to obtain, if possible, the lowest office among his father’s domestics—]

These exactly describe the steps of a sinner’s return to God

[He first begins to see how madly and wickedly he has acted—

He feels that he has reduced himself to a wretched and perishing condition—

He considers how happy are those once despised people, who enjoy the favour of his heavenly Father—

And how happy he himself should be, if he might but obtain the meanest place in his family—

With these views he determines to abase himself as a vile, self-ruined creature—

There are no terms so humiliating, but he finds them suited to his case—

He is rather fearful of not humbling himself sufficiently, than of aggravating his sin too much—

He resolves that he will go to a throne of grace and ask for mercy—

Nor will he wait for any more convenient season, lest he should perish before the hoped-for season arrive—

He is ashamed indeed to go in so mean and destitute a condition—

But he despairs of ever going in any other way—

He therefore breaks through all the engagements he has made with sin and Satan—

And goes, with all his guilt upon him, to his God and Saviour—

He now perhaps may be deemed *mad* by his former companions—

But he should rather be considered as now “*coming to himself*”—]

The effect of the prodigal's repentance appears in

III. His reception

His father, it seems, was wishfully looking out for him—

And, on his first appearance, ran to testify his good will towards him

[The sight of the returning child caused the father's bowels to yearn over him—

Nor would he suffer an upbraiding word to escape his lips—

When the prodigal began his confession, the father interrupted him with kisses—

And not only would not hear the whole of his confession, but would not even hurt his feelings by saying that he pardoned him—

He ordered the best robe, with shoes and a ring, to be instantly put upon him—

And killed the fatted calf in order to celebrate the joyful occasion—]

What a delightful representation does this give us of the reception which penitents find with God!—

[God longs for their salvation even while they are at a distance from him—

He notices with joy the first approaches of their souls towards him—

Instead of frowning on the prodigal, he receives him with joy—

Instead

Instead of upbraiding him with his folly, he seals upon his soul a sense of pardon—

He arrays him in robes of righteousness and garments of salvation—

He adorns him in a manner suited to the relation into which he is brought—

He provides for his future comfortable and upright conversation—

He rejoices over him as recovered from the dead—

And makes it an occasion of festivity to all the angels in heaven—

Thus do even the vilest sinners find their hopes, not only realized, but far exceeded—

They come for pardon, and obtain joy; for deliverance from hell, and get a title to heaven—

Their utmost ambition is to be regarded as the meanest of God's servants; and they are exalted to all the honours and happiness of his beloved children—]

APPLICATION

[Who would not wish to resemble this prodigal in his reception with his father—

But, in order to it, we must resemble him in his penitence and contrition—

Let none think that, because they have been more moral than the prodigal, they do not need to repent like him—

All of us without exception have walked after the imagination of our own hearts, without any love to his presence or regard for his authority—

Let all of us then cry for mercy, as miserable sinners—

The more vile we are in our own eyes, the more acceptable shall we be to God—

Some perhaps may fear to return, because they have been so exceeding vile—

But let none imagine that they have gone beyond the reach of mercy—

The promise of acceptance extends to all without exception^a—

“There is bread enough and to spare” for all that will go to God—

Let all then accept the Saviour's invitation^b—

Let us this day afford an occasion of joy to all the hosts of heaven—

Then shall we ourselves be soon made partakers of their joy—

And dwell, as dear children, in our Father's house for ever and ever—]

^a John vii. 37.

^b Matt. xi. 28.

CCLVIII. THE PRODIGAL'S ELDER BROTHER.

Luke xv. 28.—*And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

IT is an undeniable fact, that many who have lived a profligate life are received afterwards to God's favour; and that many who have been externally moral are excluded from it—

But this ought not to be a stumbling-block to us, since there will always be found a corresponding difference of character in the persons rejected or received—

The prodigal had been abandoned; but was renewed in the spirit of his mind—

The elder brother had been moral; but was proud, envious, discontented, querulous—

The character of the latter well deserves a distinct consideration—

We shall notice

I. The disposition of the elder brother

Some think that he was intended to represent a pious character—

And doubtless there have been good men, who too nearly resembled him^a—

And, on this supposition, his father's address to him will have no difficulty^b—

But the parable in this case would not have been suitable to the occasion^c—

Yea, it would rather have tended to mislead the Pharisees, and to foster the conceit they had of their own piety—

His character rather represents that of the murmuring Pharisees, as that of the prodigal does of the repenting Publicans—

It might indeed have some further reference to the Jews and Gentiles^d—

But it admirably portrays the character of Pharisees in every age—

The

^a Jonah iii. 10. and iv. 1, 9. Acts xi. 2, 3.

^b Ver. 31. ^c Ver. 1—3.

^d Acts xiii. 42, 44, 45. and xxii. 21—23.

The two things noticed in the text especially demand our attention

1. His displeasure at the reception of the prodigal

[On being informed of his brother's reception, "he was angry"—

When intreated by his father to join in the festivity, he began to boast of his own blameless and meritorious conduct—

He complained that sufficient respect had not been paid to his services—

He rehearsed with envious triumph and malicious exaggeration the misconduct of the prodigal—

And disdained to acknowledge him as a brother, whom his father had received and entertained as a son—

How strongly does this exhibit the disposition and conduct of modern Pharisees!—

It affords them pain rather than pleasure to hear of the conversion of notorious sinners—

When urged to embrace the salvation offered in the gospel, they deny that they are in danger of perishing, or that they have ever merited the wrath of God—

When told that their own righteousness can never justify them before God, they complain that their works are undervalued, and that all inducement to perform them is taken away—

The recital of a penitent's joy fills them with envious rage and malignant jealousy—

They take occasion from his former misconduct to represent his change as mere hypocrisy—

And, instead of regarding him with brotherly affection, they pour contempt upon him as a weak deluded enthusiast^e—]

2. His unwillingness to participate in the happiness provided for him

[The invitations given to him by his father were rejected with disdain—

As the feast was not made in honour of *him*, he could find no pleasure in partaking of it—

Thus it is with Pharisees in every age—

When we invite them to come to the feast provided in the gospel, they put us off with excuses—

However rich the feast, or sublime the joy, they have no appetite for it, no desire after it—

If we were to tell them that their own good works should be the objects of admiration and applause, they would be delighted

^e With what bitter contempt and sarcastic virulence, will they sometimes exclaim, That is one of your *saints*!

delighted with the idea, and eagerly embrace the honour offered them—

But when they find that all the praise is to be given “to God and to the Lamb,” they have no ear for such music, no taste for such employment—]

Having seen the disposition of the elder brother, let us notice

II. The conduct of the father as contrasted with it

Nothing can be more odious than the character we have seen; or more amiable than that which we are going to contemplate—Behold

1. His forbearance

[How justly might the father have closed the conference on the first refusal—

And given orders for the final exclusion of this insolent complainant!—

But, as he had borne with the prodigal in his departure, so now he bears with the pride and obstinacy of his envious brother—

And how long has he exercised his patience towards *us*!—

Times without number has he entreated us to accept of mercy—

Yet his invitations have, in many instances, excited nothing but disgust—

Still however, with much long-suffering, he continues to strive with us by his word and spirit—]

2. His condescension

[He did not send a servant, but went out himself to intreat his son—

And, instead of controverting, as he might well have done, the statement of his son, *he argued with him on his own principles*^f—

He affectionately reminded him, that if no such feast had been made for *him*, there had not been any thing withheld from him that he had desired—

That the favour shewn to the prodigal did not proceed from any undue partiality, but from the peculiar circumstances of his return—

And that nothing would be more gratifying to him, than to have both his sons partakers of the same happiness—

He

^f This gives the proper clue to the difficulties in ver. 31. The Pharisees had access to God at all times; and all the privileges they could desire were enjoyed by them (see Rom. ix. 4.) so that, whatever favour might be shewn to others, *they* could lose nothing, nor could have any reason to complain.

He shewed him further, that there was a meetness and propriety in the joy manifested on that occasion—

And that *he*, as a “*brother*,” ought to join in it with his whole heart—

Such is the condescension which we also have experienced at God’s hands—

How has he argued with us to overcome our reluctance!—

And laboured to convince us, when he might have justly left us to our own obstinate resolves!—]

3. His love

[The love shewn by him to the returning prodigal excites our admiration—

But that was no less which was manifested to his ungracious brother—

The solicitude expressed was not at all inferior to the joy—

And is he not shewing to *us* also the same parental tenderness?—

Is he not as unwilling to give *us* up to our own delusions?—

Yes, his language to *us* is precisely that which he used to Israel of old ^a—]

Surely then THIS SUBJECT MAY TEACH US

1. The evil and danger of Self-righteousness

[Self-righteousness is a more complicated evil than is generally imagined—

It not unfrequently is accompanied with pride, envy, discontent, and a thousand other evil tempers reigning in the bosom—

And it always involves in it a high conceit of ourselves, a supercilious contempt of others, and a rooted aversion to the gospel method of salvation^b—

Moreover, if persevered in, it will infallibly leave us *self-excluded* from the kingdom of heaven—

Let us pause then, and solemnly examine whether *we* be not under its dominion?—

Let us enquire whether we more resemble this elder brother, or the repenting prodigal?—

And, instead of justifying ourselves before God, let us thankfully accept his proffered mercy—]

2. The blessedness of true penitents

[While the elder brother was agitated with evil tempers, the prodigal was filled with peace—

And while the elder brother was self-excluded from the scenes of bliss, the prodigal had “meat to eat which the world knows not of,” and “joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not” —

Such

^a Hos. xi. 8.

^b Luke xviii. 11.

Such is the harvest which all shall reap who sow in tears—

Who that compares the state of the two brothers would not prefer that of the penitent even in this life?—

And how much more will its superiority appear, when the happiness of admission to the Father's house, and the misery of exclusion from it, will be consummated!—

Let us then, if we determine (as we must) in favour of the prodigal, go instantly, and prostrate ourselves before our offended God—]

CCLIX. THE UNJUST STEWARD.

Luke xvi. 8.—*And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*

THE parables never were intended to bear to the same point in every particular—

Some admit of a fuller, and others of a more partial application—

Some are to be interpreted *solely* in reference to the principal idea contained in them—

It is of great importance that we should read them under this impression—

If we endeavour to accommodate all their parts to the main scope, we shall both mar their beauty, and deduce from them the most fatal errors—

This observation is particularly to be attended to in considering the parable before us—

It will instantly remove all the cavils which have been raised against our Saviour as a minister of sin—

And it will enable us to collect much useful instruction from this valuable portion of holy scripture—

The text leads us to consider

I. The wisdom of the unjust steward

He had frequently betrayed the trust reposed in him by his lord and master—

If he had not purloined, he had profusely wasted, his master's substance—

And for this he was now to be discharged from his stewardship

[It is in vain for persons to hope that they shall always escape detection—

Dishonesty

Dishonesty may be practised for awhile, but it will generally defeat its own ends—

This steward had hoped to derive pleasure, if not profit, from his unfaithfulness—

But in the issue it involved him in much distress and poverty—

No sooner was it discovered than it exposed him to shame—

And provoked his master to dismiss him from his service—]

But he contrived a way to remedy, in a measure, the evil he had brought upon himself

[As soon as he had received warning, he began to say, What shall I do?—

Nor ceased from his enquiries till he had devised an happy expedient—

He felt in himself that he was too idle to work, and too proud to beg—

Nor had he any hopes of obtaining another situation of trust and confidence—

It was probable therefore that he might soon experience the pressure of extreme indigence—

An artful plan for supplying his wants speedily arose in his mind—

He determined to make all his master's debtors accomplices in his iniquity—

He remitted to every one a considerable portion of the sum he owed—

Thus he secured their present friendship and future recommendations—

They would not dare to oppose him, lest their own dishonesty should be revealed by him—

He would be able to make them afterwards accede to any of his proposals—

He cared not how much guilt he contracted, or how many souls he ruined—

All which he desired, was, to secure a home till he should be otherwise provided—

And doubtless his contrivance was well adapted to the end proposed—]

This device was commended by our Lord

[Christ himself seems to be the person who gave the commendation^a—

But it was the *ingenuity*, and not the *dishonesty*, that he commended—

The very epithet which he gave the steward shewed his disapprobation of the *act*—

The

^a It was the same person who uttered the words in the text.

The text itself explicitly declares the *only* ground of our Lord's applause^b—]

It admirably illustrates (what alone our Lord intended to illustrate)

II. The comparative folly of God's own children

"The children of this world" are very indefatigable in prosecuting their *temporal* interests—

But "the children of light" ought to be incomparably more earnest in pursuing their *spiritual* interests

[They are called "children of light" because they are enlightened by God's word and spirit—

They have been "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light" of the gospel—

They see the vanity of all things that are visible and temporal—

And the infinite importance of those that are invisible and eternal^c—

They know what a strict account they must shortly give of their stewardship—

And the necessity of improving every hour in securing an "everlasting habitation"—

They know how much more important are their interests, more honourable their work, more certain their success, and more glorious their reward—

They therefore should be more concerned about their souls than others are about their bodies—

And "labour more for the meat that endureth, than others for that which perisheth^d"—]

It must be owned however that the children of this world discover more wisdom in the prosecution of *their* interests

They seek them *more earnestly*

[What quickness in conceiving, eagerness in maturing, and promptness in executing his plans, did the unjust steward discover^e!—

Thus worldly men in general find it easy to put forth the whole energy of their souls—

But where is the Christian that displays such ardour in his pursuits?—

How rarely can the spiritual man thus engage in his work!—

Alas! what backwardness to duty, what languor in it, and what readiness to disengage himself from it, does he feel!—

Happy

^b "He had done wisely." ^c 2 Cor. iv. 18. ^d John vi. 27.

^e "What shall I do?—I am resolved—so he called—every one—sit down quickly"—

Happy indeed would he be who could fully equal the zeal of worldlings—

But christians have to oppose the tide of their corrupt nature, while others have only to commit themselves to its impetuous current—]

They follow them *more uniformly*

[The children of this world have at all times an eye to their own advantage—

Though their thoughts be not immediately engaged about business, they can turn them into that channel the very instant that prospects of gain arise—

But the children of light are often wholly indisposed for spiritual exercises^f—

Too often do they find occasion to adopt the language of St. Paul^g—

And frequently are they ready to compare themselves with the very beasts that perish^h—]

They contrive for them *more ingeniously*

[If a worldly man have prospects of advancement he will devise a thousand means to attain his end—

If he have reason to fear a loss, he will try many expedients to avert, to mitigate, or to remedy the evil—

He will rarely lose any thing which his cunning will enable him to secure—

But how often does the Christian suffer loss purely through his own folly!—

How often does he see infallible means of gain, and yet neglect to use them!—

And infallible means of injury which he is not careful to shun!—

Many times is he forced to adopt that most humiliating confessionⁱ—]

To prevent misapprehension, we subjoin a word of CAUTION

[Let not any one suppose that one fraud may be committed in order to prevent the consequences of another—

This is too often practised; but it plunges the offender in deeper guilt and shame—

God has warned us in many places what will be the reward of dishonesty^k—

It is impossible that they who defraud an earthly master can be accepted of God—

However their ingenuity may be admired, it will prove folly in the issue—

Let

^f Gal. v. 17.

^g Rom. vii. 13, 15, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23.

ⁱ Ps. lxxiii. 22. Prov. xxx. 2.

^h Isai. i. 3.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

Let every one then, who professes to be a child of light remember the apostle's words¹—]

To enforce the subject we conclude with suitable
ADVICE

1. Be faithful to your Lord and Master

[If ye be Christians indeed, Christ is the master whom ye serve—

Be faithful to him, then, whether ye have little or much^m—
Especially honour him in the distribution of the unrighteous mammonⁿ—

He is a kind and liberal Master that does not grudge you any thing that is good—

Nevertheless he expects that you improve for him the talents he has committed to you—]

2. Be diligent in his service

[We see how diligent worldlings are in the service of the world—

Let not us be surpassed by them—

We have a far better Master, and an infinitely richer reward—]

3. Stand ready to give up your account to him

[We know not how soon he will say, Give an account of thy stewardship—

But it will be a joyful word to those who shall be found ready—

Let us then be daily inspecting and balancing our accounts—

He will then give us the *true* riches^o—

He will bestow upon us what shall to all eternity be *our own*^p—]

¹ 1 John i. 6.

^o Ver. 11.

^m Prov. xxiii. 26.

ⁿ Ver. 12. ^p Ver. 12. Matt. xxiv. 45—47.

^d Ver. 13.

CCLX. THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

Luke xvi. 25. *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

THE more strongly the discourses of a minister bear upon the prevailing vices of the day, the more will they,

whose besetting sin is pointed out and reprobated, pour contempt upon the preacher and his word. Our blessed Lord had spoken the parable of the unjust steward, in order to shew that every one should consider himself as responsible to God for the use he makes of that which is entrusted to him. "The Pharisees, who were covetous, immediately derided him^a." Our Lord, however, was not to be deterred by their derision; on the contrary, he addressed to them a personal and severe reproof, and added another parable, that should enforce, with tenfold energy, his preceding admonitions. He represented a rich man, after a short enjoyment of his carnal pleasures, doomed to eternal misery in hell; and a poor man, after a transient scene of sufferings on earth, exalted to a state of everlasting felicity in heaven.

In opening this parable we shall present to your view

I. Their different conditions in this world

The rich man enjoyed all that could gratify an earthly mind

[High titles, stately mansions, superb clothing, pompous equipage, numerous attendants, sumptuous entertainments, courtly friends, and flattering sycophants, were his distinguished portion, his daily enjoyment——— These were the things in which he took delight; nor had his vain, earthly heart a thought or wish beyond them^b. Doubtless he was to many in his day an object of admiration and envy. And many amongst ourselves are ready to say, Give me but such a portion as his, and I desire no more.]

The poor man was as destitute as an human being could be

[He wanted even the most common necessaries of life. In addition to this, he was "full of sores" from head to foot; without medical aid to cure them, or even a friendly hand to bind them up; so that "the very dogs came and licked them." Unable to walk, he was carried, and, as if no man cared what became of him, was cast^c at the rich man's gate, to gather a scanty and precarious subsistence from the crumbs which fell from his table. Thus destitute of food, of health, of friends, a very outcast from society, he protracted a wretched existence, till death relieved him of his sorrows.

Who would have thought that these two men were of the same species, or that, if they were, a just and merciful God should put such a difference between them ?]

But

^a Ver. 14.

^b "Thy good things."

^c ἑβέλητο.

But our minds will be reconciled to this seeming inequality of state, if we survey

II. Their still more different conditions in the invisible world

The rich man was reduced to a state of deserved misery

[We read not of any enormous crimes that he committed; and therefore we cannot justly impute any to him. His elegant clothing and costly fare were not in themselves sinful, provided they were such as were suited to his station in life. That which constituted his guilt in the sight of God was, that his heart was set upon them; that he sought his happiness in them rather than in God; and that he lived solely for himself, to the neglect of those, whose necessities he should have delighted to relieve. And behold, what fearful punishment this iniquity brought upon him! His career of sin was soon terminated; and nothing of all his happiness remained to him but the guilt which he had contracted by it. He was buried indeed in a sumptuous manner; but what pleasure could he receive from funeral processions, sepulchral monuments, or flattering inscriptions? Alas! his body was insensible of the honours paid to it, and his soul was enduring unutterable anguish in the flames of hell. He prayed indeed, but his prayer was now too late. Had he called upon God when he was on earth, he might have obtained all the glory of heaven: but now he was refused, though he asked no more than a momentary mitigation of his pain. He begged that a messenger might be sent to warn and to convince his five surviving brethren, who were walking securely in his delusive steps: but neither could this be granted him; nor indeed would it have been of any use to those who disregarded the testimony of the sacred records. Instead of finding any relief, he was upbraided with his having sought an earthly portion, while he neglected those things which were to endure for ever; the remembrance of which folly could not but greatly aggravate his misery. Ah! how altered now his state, from honour to ignominy, from pleasure to pain, from affluence to extremest want!]

The poor man, on the contrary, was raised to a state of unspeakable felicity

[As death put a speedy period to the enjoyments of the one, so it soon also terminated the sorrows of the other. Nothing is spoken of the burial of the poor man; he was carried unnoticed, unregretted to the silent grave; or rather, his fellow-creatures probably rejoiced that they were rid of a public nuisance. Not but that he was honoured in his death;

for though disregarded by men, he was attended by angels, who gladly received his departing spirit, and bore it on their wings to the regions of light and glory. Let our eyes now follow him to his blest abode: behold, he, who once had scarcely enough to satisfy the cravings of nature, is now sitting next to Abraham himself at the heavenly banquet^d; while the man who had “fared sumptuously every day” on earth, has not so much as a drop of water to cool his tongue! Nothing now remains to him of all his former sorrows, except their sanctifying influence on his soul. Now he has the good things which he sought on earth, the things in which alone he found delight. The enjoyment of the divine presence was then his only consolation; and now it is his abiding, his ever-blessed portion.

Now let us contrast the two; and we shall confess that Lazarus with all his penury was, on the whole, an object of envy; while the rich man with all his indulgences was, on the whole, an object of the deepest commiseration.]

Let us LEARN from hence

1. How vain are riches without grace!

[What could the rich man’s wealth procure him in this life? nothing but food and raiment: nor were his delicacies more sweet to him than to the cottager his homely meal. His riches could not ward off for a moment the stroke of death; much less could they “profit him in the day of wrath.” They served only to witness against him, and to “prey upon his flesh like fire^e.” Let not any then envy the great and gay; but rather seek to be rich in grace, and happy in the enjoyment of their God.]

2. What consolation will religion afford under the severest trials!

[Though Lazarus appeared so destitute, he doubtless had his comforts as well as his sorrows. He would console himself with such reflections as these: ‘I have no earthly treasures; but I have treasures laid up for me in heaven: I am diseased in body; but my soul flourishes in health and vigour: I am scantily supported with refuse crumbs; but I have meat to eat which the world knows not of: I am without a mortal friend to minister unto me; but God is my friend, and angels are my ministering servants: I have nothing that I can call my own in this life; but I have all the glory of heaven in the life to come.’ Yes, thousands of such considerations

^d At feasts they lay on couches; so that one seemed, as it were, to be in the bosom of the person next to him. In this view, the circumstance of his being in Abraham’s bosom is well worthy of notice.

^e Jam. v. 1—5.

considerations would raise his drooping spirits, and often render him happier than all the gratifications of sense could possibly have done. And all who possess real religion in their hearts shall find it as conducive to their happiness in this life, as it is to their eternal felicity.]

3. How earnestly we should improve our time in preparation for eternity !

[Whether we be in prosperity or in affliction, we are hastening to the grave : the whole of this life is but as a dream : death will soon terminate our present joys or sorrows : and our condition in the future world will depend entirely on the manner in which we have lived in this state of probation. God has drawn aside for a moment the veil of the invisible world ; and shewn us what we shall all be in a little time : yes ; all of us shall be banquetting in heaven, or agonizing with inexpressible, unintermitted anguish in hell : and in whichever state we be, all transition from it will be prevented by an "impassable gulf." Let us endeavour to realize these awful truths. Let us believe what the scriptures have told us respecting the issue of a worldly life. Let us pity those who, like the five brethren, are hastening in the delusive paths of ease and pleasure to the place of torment. And let us live now, as we shall wish we had lived, when our state shall be for ever fixed.]

CCLXI. THE OBEDIENT SERVANT.

Luke xvii. 10. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

PRIDE is deeply rooted in the heart of man—It was that which first instigated him to disobedience ; he wished to be as God ^a—Since his fall it leads him openly to cast off his allegiance to the Supreme Being—And to become a god unto himself, independent, self-seeking, and self-sufficient—This principle operates even in the renewed mind—And endangers the acceptance of our persons and services ^b—Our Lord frequently cautioned his disciples against it—He had just inculcated the arduous duty of forgiving injuries ^c—And had assured them that, however difficult

^a Gen. iii. 5.

^b 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^c Ver. 3. 4.

difficult it might be, faith would enable them to fulfil it^d—But, aware that such obedience might serve as an occasion for pride and vain-glory, he now teaches them, by a just comparison^e, what thoughts they should ever entertain even of their best services—We shall consider

I. The comparison

The extent of God's authority over us is not sufficiently considered—

There is no slave so much at his master's disposal as we are at God's—

The Jews exercised a most despotic power over their servants

[Some of the servants among the Jews were captives taken in war—Others were slaves bought with money—Over these, their master had unlimited authority—They were regarded by him as his stock, and, like his cattle, were transmitted to his children as a part of their inheritance^f—They were employed in all kinds of services—Nor did their master esteem himself indebted to them for any services they might perform—This was perfectly well known to those whom our Lord addressed^g—Perhaps many of his hearers had servants whom they so treated—Hence our Lord appealed to them respecting the truth of his statement—]

But God has infinitely higher claim to our services

[He *originally formed us* in the womb—We have not a faculty which we did not receive from him—This gives him an entire right over us^h—He, upon this very ground, has an unlimited authority over the greatest monarch, as much as over the meanest slaveⁱ—He has *preserved us* every moment since our first existence in the world—However he may have made use of second causes, he has been “the author of every blessing” we have enjoyed—The beasts are not so dependent on their owner as we on him—On this ground he claimed the homage of his people of old^k—And may justly demand our utmost exertions in his service—He moreover has *bought us* with a price—He has paid down a sum which exceeds all calculation—Silver and gold were insufficient for the cost—Nothing would suffice but the blood of his only dear Son—

Behold,

^d Ver. 3, 6.

^e Ver. 7—9.

^f Lev. xxv. 44—46.

^g In this land of liberty this state of things does not exist: would to God it did not in any part of the British dominions!

^h Isai. xlv. 21.

ⁱ Job xxxi. 13—15.

^k Exod. xx. 2, 3.

Behold, he withheld not the mighty ransom^l—He delivered up his Son for us all^m—And has not this given him a right over us?—Can we say in any respect that “*we are our own?*”—Is not the apostle’s inference just, That we should *glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are hisⁿ?*—]

Hence it is evident that we can never confer an obligation upon him

[Even hired servants do not confer an obligation by the services they render—Much less do they, who belong to their master as his purchased possession—Least of all can we make GOD our debtor—We can do no more than what is our absolute duty to do—Works of supererogation exist only in the conceits of blind superstitious papists—The idea of performing them is arrogant in the extreme—None can entertain it in their minds without involving their souls in utter ruin—The point is decided for us by the voice of inspiration^o—]

The justness of the comparison being made to appear, we proceed to consider

II. The command grounded upon it

The injunction in the text is manifestly grounded on the preceding comparison—It imports

1. That we should not be puffed up with a conceit of our high attainments

[There is no notice taken of our manifold defects—It is supposed that we actually do *all* that is commanded us—Yet even on that supposition we have nothing to boast of—However perfect our obedience were in all other respects, pride would at once debase it all—God will have no flesh to glory in his presence—The very angels, who never fell, are constrained to give all the glory to God^p—The seraphim around the throne veil their faces and their feet as unworthy to behold or to serve their Maker^q—And the glorified saints cast their crowns at the feet of Jesus, ascribing all their happiness to him alone^r—Sinful man therefore can never have whereof to glory before God—His zeal and holiness can be of no account with God if once they be made the grounds of his confidence—God, so far from approving such a proud boaster, would abhor him^s—And would surely abase him in the day of judgment^t—]

2. That we should be humbled under a sense of our unprofitableness

[It

^l 1. Pet. i. 18, 19.

^m Rom. viii. 32.

ⁿ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

^o Rom. xi. 35, 36.

^p Rev. v. 11, 12,

^q Isai. vi. 2.

^r Rev. iv. 10.

^s Jam. iv. 6.

^t Prov. xvi. 5.

[It is not possible that our works should profit God^u—Nothing that we can do can render him more happy or more glorious^x—We should live and act under a sense of this—The apostles themselves were directed to consider their best works as worthless^y—Indeed, the truly enlightened in all ages have judged thus of themselves—Job abhorred himself in dust and ashes^z—Isaiah seemed to himself like a poor leper, at the very moment that he was favoured with an heavenly vision^a—Paul accounted himself “less than the least of all saints,” yea, the very “chief of sinners^b”—In this light should we continually view our best performances—And acknowledge that “our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags^c”—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are looking for acceptance through their own works

[How manifestly is your spirit contrary to that which the gospel recommends!—You are endeavouring to establish a righteousness of your own—You not only think to compensate for your sins, but to have a degree of merit sufficient to purchase heaven—Perhaps you profess only to rely on your works *in part*—But in whatever degree you expect them to weigh, you so far make God your debtor—Hear, I pray you, the voice of Christ in the text—Renounce from henceforth all self-righteousness, and self-dependence—And learn to say with the great apostle, “I count all things but dung for the knowledge of Christ^d”—]

2. Those, who, professing to trust in Christ, are indulging self-complacency

[It is inexpressibly difficult to maintain a truly humble spirit—Pride will rise in spite of our better judgment—And often operate when we are least aware of it—Our love of man’s applause too often appears even under the garb of humility—Let us guard against self-deceit—God sees through the veil of our hypocrisy—And will leave us to feel the sad effects of our corruption—He has warned us plainly of our danger^e—“Let him therefore who thinketh that he stands, take heed lest he fall^f”—Let him “not be high-minded, but fear^g”—]

3. Those who are dejected because of their unprofitableness

[It is well to be humbled under a sense of our infirmities—But the feeling of them is an effect of divine grace—Our
contrition

^u Ps. xvi. 2.

^y The text.

^z Isaï. vi. 5.

^a Isaï. lxiv. 6.

^c Prov. xvi. 18.

^x Job xxii. 2, 3.

^z Job xl. 4. xlii. 6.

^b Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 15.

^d Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^f 1 Cor. x. 12.

^g Rom. xi. 20.

contrition therefore should be tempered with thankfulness—
 Let us not forget that such a state of mind is approved of
 God—Instead of desponding, let us cleave more stedfastly to
 Christ^h—The viler we are in our own eyes, the more precious
 let him be to us—Thus will he increase as we decreaseⁱ—
 And we ourselves shall be exalted in proportion to our self-
 abasement^k—Let us in the meantime do all that we can to
 serve him—If we cannot *profit* him by fulfilling his commands,
 we may *please* him—Let that be our constant ambition^l—
 Then, though we have no claim upon him for a reward, he
 will requite our services—Nor shall the smallest attempt to
 honour him be overlooked^m—]

^h Acts xi. 23.ⁱ John iii. 30.^k Matt. xxiii. 12.^l 2 Cor. v. 9. φιλοτιμέμεθα.^m Eph. vi. 8.

CCLXII. THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

Luke xviii. 6—8. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith upon the earth?*

THERE is no duty more strongly enforced in scripture than that of prayer—

Nor is there any which needs to be more impressed upon the conscience—

To those, who have never engaged in this duty with real spirituality of mind, it may appear easy to be performed—

But they, who are most earnest in the discharge of it, find many difficulties to combat with—

To encourage us to persevere in spite of all those difficulties, our Lord spake the parable before us^a—

We shall consider

I. What the unjust judge said

There was a widow labouring under some heavy oppression

^a Ver. 1.

[Sin has universally armed men against their fellow-creatures—

The world is full of robbery and oppression of every kind^b—

And they who are most defenceless usually suffer the greatest injuries—

Every one is ready to take advantage of the fatherless and the widow—

It is their comfort, however, that, if they have enemies on earth, they have a friend in heaven^c—]

She went to a magistrate to redress her grievances

[The appointment of magistrates is a rich blessing to the community—

And they ought to be regarded with much respect and gratitude—

We should not indeed be going to law about every trifle—

We should rather settle our disputes, if possible, by arbitration—

But under the widow's circumstances, it was right to solicit the magistrate's interference—]

The judge, for a long season, would pay no attention to her request

[The judge happened to be of a most abandoned character—

He had no fear of the holy, omniscient, almighty God—

He did not even regard the good opinion of mankind—

Thus he had no rule of conduct but his own caprice or interest—

Surely, next to a vicious minister, there can be no greater curse to a neighbourhood than such an abandoned magistrate as this—

We have reason to bless God, however, that though such characters are too common, they are rarely to be found among the magistracy—

No wonder that such an one was deaf to the cries of equity and compassion—]

At last, however, he acknowledged himself overcome by her importunity

[He gloried in his contempt of all laws human and divine^d—

But he could not bear the constant intreaties of the widow—

He was afraid of being “wearied” or even stunned^e with her cries—

He therefore, purely to get rid of her, interposed on her behalf—

And

^b Ps. lxxiv. 20.

^d Ver. 4.

^e Ps. lxxviii. 5.

^e Ὑπωπιάζη με, obtundat me.

And did that for his own ease, which he should have done from a better motive—

Thus, alas! he proclaimed his own shame!—

But declared, in a very striking manner, the efficacy of importunity—]

His speech, impious as it was, may be rendered profitable to our souls

II. The improvement suggested by our Lord

Our Lord makes a twofold application of the subject

1. In a way of instruction

We all, in a spiritual view, resemble this helpless widow

[We are beset with enemies both within and without—

Our conflicts with indwelling corruption are great and manifold—

We have moreover to contend with all the powers of darkness^f—

Nor have we in ourselves any strength to resist our adversaries^g—]

But God, the judge of all, will help us if we call upon him

[God has promised to hear the supplications of his people^h—

He has declared that he will “cast out none who come to him”—

He may indeed for wise reasons delay his answers to prayer—

He may “bear so long with us” as to make us think he will not hear—

But he will never fail to succour us in the fittest season—]

This may be strongly deduced from the preceding parable

[*The widow was a stranger*, not at all related to the judge—

But we are “God’s elect,” his favoured and “peculiar people”—

The unjust judge was not interested in granting her petition—

But God’s honour is concerned in relieving the wants of his peopleⁱ—

We may even address him in the language of holy David^k—

There was little hope of prevailing with such a *merciless and unjust judge*—

But we have to go to a loving, and compassionate Father^l—

The

^f Eph. vi. 12.

^g John xv. 5.

^h Matt. vii. 7, 8.

ⁱ John xiv. 13.

^k Ps. lxxiv. 22.

^l Joel ii. 13.

The widow moreover had none to intercede for her—

But we have a righteous and all-prevailing advocate ^m—

She was in danger of irritating the judge by her intreaties—

But the more importunate we are, the more God is pleased with us ⁿ—

She notwithstanding all her difficulties obtained her request—

How much more then shall we, who, in lieu of her difficulties, have such abundant encouragements!—

Surely this deduction is as consoling as it is plain and obvious—

And our Lord, with peculiar earnestness, confirms it ^o—

Nor can that be justly deemed tardy, which comes in the fittest season—]

2. In a way of reproof

There is but little of such importunity to be found—

Nor is this to be wondered at, since there is so little “*faith* on the earth”

[Faith is that principle from whence earnest prayer proceeds—

If we believe the declarations of God, we must feel ourselves weak and helpless—

If we credit his promises, we shall acknowledge his readiness to help us—

And if we believe the reality and importance of eternal things, we shall most earnestly seek help from God—

Nor shall we be unwilling to wait till he see fit to answer us—

But how little is there of such *faith* in the world!—

How few are faithful to the convictions of their own conscience!—

How few maintain this holy constancy and fervour in prayer!—

How few can be truly called “a people nigh unto God!”—]

If Christ should now come to judgment, would he find this *faith* in *us*?

[Some live without any acknowledgment of God in prayer—

They seem to have forgotten that there will be a day of judgment—

Others engage stately in their accustomed round of duties—

And satisfy themselves with an unmeaning recital of certain words—

There are others also who under the pressure of affliction will cry to God—

But

^m 1 John ii. 1.

ⁿ Prov. xv. 8. Isai. lxii. 7.

^o He first appeals to us, and then adds, “I tell you,” &c.

But are soon weary of a service in which they have no pleasure—

Few, very few, it is to be feared, resemble the importunate widow—

Few pray, as if they thoroughly believed the efficacy of prayer—

If “Christ should now come, would he find faith” in us?—

He will surely enquire as well respecting our faith as our works—

And if we have not the faith that stimulates us to prayer, he will appoint us our portion with the unbelievers—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who live without prayer

[Such persons are as devoid of reason as they are of piety—

What madness is it to neglect heaven when it may be obtained by such means!—

And how will such thoughtless sinners ere long bewail their folly!—

We cannot but address them as the mariners did the sleeping prophet^p—]

2. Those who pray only in a formal manner

[Formal services are far from being pleasing and acceptable to God—

They tend, for the most part, only to deceive our own souls—

God requires us to worship him in spirit and in truth^q—

Let us then remember the awful declaration of our Lord^r—]

3. Those who, after praying for a season, become remiss again

[See whether it be not the love of earthly things that hath hindered you—

If so, repent and do your first works, and turn unto your God^s—

But perhaps you faint merely through the discouragements you meet with^t—

Let the remembrance of the importunate widow revive your hopes—

Justify God, as the Psalmist did in similar circumstances^u—

And renew your application to him in dependence on his gracious promise^x—]

4. Those

^p Jonah i. 6.

^q John iv. 23, 24.

^r Mark vii. 6, 7.

^s Rev. ii. v.

^t Ps. lxxvii. 7—9. Prov. xiii. 12.

^u Ps. xxii. 2, 3.

^x Hab. ii. 3.

4. Those that have received gracious answers to prayer
 [Let not the goodness of God to you become an occasion
 of pride—

God was not first moved by any worthiness in your petitions;
 but he stirred you up to ask, because he had before determined
 to give—

If this view of things be humiliating, it also affords much
 encouragement—

Every believing prayer may be considered as a pledge of
 the blessings asked^y—

Adopt therefore the pious resolution of the Psalmist^z—
 So shall your prayers terminate in everlasting praises—]

^y Ps. vi. 9.

^z Ps. cxvi. 2.

CCLXIII. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

Luke xviii. 13, 14. *And the Publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.*

MANY express their regret, that religion is so generally neglected—

And doubtless, a considerate man cannot reflect upon it but with grief—

But it is common also to substitute a formal and mistaken religion in the place of that which is spiritual and saving—

Nor is there sufficient jealousy entertained on this subject—

The Pharisees of old were extremely diligent in the observance of outward duties—

But, while they “trusted in themselves that they were righteous,” they were as far from the kingdom of God as if they had been openly profane—

For the conviction of such persons, our Lord contrasted, in a parable, the spirit of a self-righteous Pharisee with that of a repenting Publican—

He represented them as engaged in prayer, which is a season when most of all they discover their true character—

He then declared the very different acceptance they met with from God—

In pursuance of our Lord's design, we will open more fully

I. The different dispositions they manifested in prayer

The Pharisee, with apparent devotion, gave thanks to God

[The Pharisee might with propriety bless God for his preventing grace—

And acknowledge with gratitude whatever God had wrought in him—

Nor was it sinful to feel a pleasure in reviewing his past life—

St. Paul, on proper occasions, spake of his disinterestedness and generosity^a—

He thanked God also that he had laboured more than all the apostles^b—

And received much satisfaction in reflecting on his own integrity^c—]

But on a more attentive survey of his spirit we shall find him actuated

1. By pride

[He came professedly with an intention to pray to God—

But he was so full of his virtues that he forgot all his wants—

His acknowledgment of God was manifestly no more than a mere compliment—

His thanksgiving was one continued eulogium upon himself—

Yet, after all, his freedom from gross sins was but a small matter to boast of—

And the duties he had practised were only the means of gratifying his vanity—]

2. By uncharitableness

[Not satisfied with commending himself, he poured contempt on all others^d—

He arrogantly presumed to judge the Publican in particular—

But what concern had he with the state of other men?—

Their greater degrees of sinfulness could not make him less sinful—

Nor should it have been a subject of boast but of lamentation—

He

^a Acts xx. 33, 34.

^c 2 Cor. i. 12.

^b 1 Cor. xv. 10.

^d Οἱ λοιποὶ, the rest of the world.

He should have taken occasion from it, not to insult over them, but to intercede for them—

But the guilt and misery of his fellow-creatures were to him a source of gratification rather than of grief—

Nor did he care how many might perish, provided he could have the satisfaction of contemplating his own superior goodness—]

3. By self-dependence

[He confessed no sins, because he thought he had none to confess—

Or that they were far over-balanced by his virtues—

He implored no help, because he felt no need of divine assistance—

He entertained no doubt of his own ability to do the will of God—

The whole of his deportment shewed the thought of his heart to be, “*In myself* have I righteousness and strength”—]

The Publican manifested a spirit altogether the reverse of this

[He was of a profession that was generally and perhaps justly execrated*—

And it is probable he had yielded to the temptations that beset him—

But now, “what had been sweet in his mouth had become gall in his bowels”—]

He approached God with deep *humility and contrition*

[He came into the temple with an holy fear and trembling—

While the Pharisee boldly walked up to the highest part, *he* stood, as it were, at the very threshold—

While the Pharisee ostentatiously spread forth his hands, *he* did not presume to “lift up so much as his eyes” to heaven—

Instead of boasting of his goodness, he humbled himself as “a sinner”—

He confessed himself to be deserving of God’s wrath and indignation—

With much anguish of spirit he “smote upon his breast”—

And cried for mercy as one who felt himself the chief of sinners—]

He placed all his *confidence in God* alone

[He did not attempt to extenuate his guilt—

Or promise amendment as a reparation for his offences—

He

* The Publicans were tax-gatherers; and, under pretence of gathering the legal imposts, generally extorted more than was due: hence their very employment was held odious, and all who engaged in it were detested.

He renounced all self-righteous methods of recommending himself to God—

And cast himself entirely upon the divine mercy—]

Services performed in so different a spirit could not find equal acceptance

II. The different success with which their prayers were attended

The Pharisee could not reasonably expect a blessing

[Many humble persons indeed would envy his conscious rectitude—

And wish that they could lay claim to such purity as his—

But, what could he obtain who did not condescend to ask any thing?—

His *pride* would set God at a greater distance from him^f—

Had he been able to boast of far greater things than he possessed, his *uncharitableness* had rendered them all of no value^g—

And his *self-dependence* cut him off from all hope in the divine mercy^h—

Hence, though full of self-applause, he departed without a blessing from God—

Though justified in his own conceit, he was under condemnation for sin—

He was odious in God's eyes in proportion as he was amiable in his own—

This is asserted, not in the text only, but in other passages of scriptureⁱ—

Jehovah himself declares this in very significant and awful terms^k—]

The Publican, on the contrary, was blessed beyond his expectation

[Many would have reprobated his down-cast look and solemn attitude—

And have judged him to be a melancholy enthusiast or a designing hypocrite—

But God regarded him with complacency and delight—

Such *humility and contrition* could not fail of engaging his care^l—

And

^f Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

^h Gal. v. 2, 4.

^k Isai. lxxv. 5. Here the Pharisee's character is described in perfect correspondence with the text: and God's indignation against him is very strongly painted.

^l Isai. lvii. 15. Ps. li. 17.

^g 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

Prov. xvi. 5.

And such *affiance in him* obliged him, as it were, to display his mercy^m—

Hence the Publican went home justified, while the Pharisee returned in a state of condemnationⁿ—

Thus it is that God will deal with every humble suppliant^o—

He will assuredly exalt us in proportion as we abase ourselves—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who trust in themselves that they are righteous
[Almost all, when interrogated about their sins, reply as this Pharisee^p—

But we shall not stand or fall by a comparison with other men—

If we have been free from some sins, we have committed many others—

And if we have practised some duties, we have neglected many others—

As sinners we must all humble ourselves like the Publican—

Not where a possibility of obtaining mercy in any other way^q—]

2. Those who are of a contemptuous spirit while they profess to believe in Christ

[Many pride themselves on the knowledge of the gospel, as the Pharisee did on his virtues—

And speak as contemptuously of the unenlightened world as he did of the Publican—

Conceited, arrogant, contentious, they make the gospel itself an occasion of sin—

Well did St. Paul reprove such persons in the Corinthian church^r—

Let them remember that humility and love are the very essence of religion—

And beware, lest the higher they are exalted in privileges, the deeper they fall into destruction—]

3. Those who are low and vile in their own esteem

[Never are you higher in God's esteem than when you are lowest in your own—

Fear not but that they who trust in God's mercy shall find mercy at his hands—

Let that faithful saying of the apostle's sink deep into your hearts^s—

Look

^m Ps. cxxv. 1. Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

ⁿ This is the import of that which the text expresses in a way of comparison.

^o Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

^p "I am not the worst of sinners," &c. &c.

^q Prov. xxviii. 13. 1 John i. 8, 9.

^r 1 Cor. iii. 3. and iv. 7.

^s 1 Tim. i. 15.

Look truly to the Saviour, and you may “go down to your house justified^t”—

To every believing penitent he speaks as he did to that repenting sinner^u—]

^t Christ emphatically says, “I say unto you,” &c.

^u Luke vii. 48, 50.

CCLXIV. THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

John x. 9. *I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*

THE importance of sound doctrine cannot be too strongly insisted on—

Error, especially in the fundamentals of religion, is as destructive as vice—

In innumerable instances, it brings both those who propagate, and those who receive it, into eternal ruin—

Hence St. Paul denounced anathemas against any one, even though he should be an angel from heaven, who should blend Judaism with Christianity—

Our Lord himself also spake of false teachers with indignation—

The Pharisees, while they rejected him, taught the people to look for salvation to their own ritual or superstitious observances—

Jesus therefore declared them to be only as “thieves and robbers,” who, instead of belonging to the flock of God, sought eventually their destruction—

And, in opposition to their false doctrines, affirmed^a himself to be the only door of admission into the fold of God—

We shall consider

I. The metaphor by which Jesus represents his own character

He had been delivering “the parable” of “the good shepherd^b”

In

^a The affirmation is exceeding strong, ver. 7. and it is repeated in the text.

^b Ver. 6. 11.

In elucidating that, he speaks of himself as “the door of the sheepfold”—

The church of God is here compared to a sheepfold

[All men in their natural state are wandering at a distance from God^c—

They neither acknowledge him as their shepherd, nor feed in his pastures—

They are strangers to that flock which is under his immediate care^d—

But in every age God has had “a chosen and peculiar people”—

In the days of Moses he brought them into a visible fold—

Till the time of Christ, all his sheep were kept within the pale of the Jewish church --

But our Lord announced his purpose to introduce the Gentiles also into his fold^e—

Now all who name the name of Christ are called his sheep—

All however who are nominally his are not *really* so^f—

It is to be feared that his sincere followers still form but “a little flock”—

But the truly upright, of whatever denomination they be, belong to him—

They are indeed often ready to cast out each other as aliens—

Nevertheless they are equally the objects of his superintending care—]

Of this fold Christ is “the door”

[Parts of Judea were probably still infested with wolves—

The sheepfolds therefore were better secured than ours—

Perhaps the entrance into them was guarded by a door—

Now, what that door was to the fold, that is Christ to the church—

Every sheep must enter into it by faith in him^g—

We are expressly said to have access unto God through him^h—

Nor indeed has there ever been any other way into the foldⁱ—

It was the blood of the sacrifice which procured admission for the high priest within the vail^k—

Through that, all believers, from the very beginning, were brought nigh to God^l—

And, through that, we also have boldness to enter into the holiest^m—

Some,

^c Isai. liii. 6.

^e Ver. 16.

^g Gal. iii. 26.

ⁱ John xiv. 6.

^l Rev. xiii. 8. with Eph. ii. 13.

^d Eph. ii. 12.

^f Rom. ii. 28. and ix. 6.

^h Eph. ii. 18.

^k Heb. ix. 7. 25.

^m Heb. x. 19, 20.

Some, it is true, have "climbed up into the fold some other way"ⁿ—

They profess to be his without having ever believed in him—
But they are regarded by him only as thieves and robbers—
Nor will they ever be admitted into the fold above—]

This description of Christ is of great importance

II. The benefit of receiving him under that character

There is no benefit which can accrue to a well attended flock, which does not arise to those who believe in Christ

1. Security

[Protection is of unspeakable benefit to a defenceless sheep—

But who can estimate the value of salvation to an immortal soul?—

Yet, such is the portion of those who enter into the fold aright—

They shall be rescued out of the jaws of the devouring lion^o—

They shall be freed from the curse and condemnation of the law^p—

Death itself, disarmed of its sting, shall have no power to hurt them^q—

Every kind and degree of penal evil shall be averted from them—

He that is empowered, is also engaged to "save them to the uttermost"^r—

And this benefit he bestows because they "come unto God by him"^s—]

2. Liberty

[A sheep left to wander on the mountains infested with wolves, might boast of its freedom from restraint—

But it would soon find what little reason there was to glory in such a privilege—

Its truest liberty is to submit itself to the direction of the shepherd—

Thus they, who live without God in the world, may boast of their liberty—

But their very freedom is, in fact, the sorest bondage^t—

And every moment they are in danger of everlasting destruction^u—

It is far otherwise with those who have entered into the fold by Christ—

Whether

ⁿ Ver. 1.	^o 2 Tim. ii. 26. 1 Pet. v. 8.
^p Rom. viii. 1.	^q 1 Cor. xv. 55—57.
^r Heb. vii. 25.	^s 2 Pet. ii. 19.
^t Ps. vii. 12, 13.	Deut. xxxii. 35.

Whether at large by day, or inclosed by night, they feel no restraint—

Through Christ they have all the liberty which their souls can desire ^u—

Secure of God's favour, "they go in and out" before him in perfect peace ^{x--}]

3. Provision

[Good pasture comprises all the wants of an highly favoured flock—

And how rich, how abundant is that, which the sheep of Christ partake of!—

There are "exceeding great and precious promises," on which they feed—

It is utterly their own fault if ever they experience a dearth ^y—

David from his personal knowledge attests this truth ^z—

And God confirms it by an express promise to all his people ^a—

This privilege too, no less than the others, is the consequence of entering into the fold by the appointed door ^b—]

ADDRESS

1. Those who are wandering at a distance from the fold

[Perhaps, like the silly sheep, you are insensible of your danger—

But the more confident you are of safety, the more certain is your ruin—

If they only, who enter in by the door, are saved, what can you expect?—

O consider, that the loss of bodily life is not to be compared with the doom that awaits you—

Nor do you know how soon that doom may be inflicted upon you—

Blessed be God, however, the door is yet open to all who come—

And the Saviour's declaration is yet sounding in your ears ^c—

He is even now desirous to bring you home on his shoulders rejoicing ^d—

Stay not then till the door be for ever closed upon you—

Let the caution given by our Lord stir you up to improve the present moment ^e—]

2. Those

^u John viii. 36.

^y Ps. xxii. 26.

^a Ezek. xxxiv. 14.

^c John vi. 37.

^x Ps. xxv. 13.

^z Ps. xxiii. 2.

^b John vi. 35.

^d Luke xv. 4—6.

^e Luke xiii. 25.

2. Those who are desirous of returning to God

[It has been already shewn that they only are saved who enter in at the door—

Now our proud hearts are extremely averse to be saved in this way—

We would rather come into the fold by some less humiliating means—

But our self-righteous attempts will be of no avail—

We must come unto God by Christ, or not at all—

Salvation never was or can be obtained through any other name than his^f—

Seek then, and that with earnestness, to enter in at the strait gate^g—

And then you shall have that promise fulfilled to you^h—]

3. Those who are dwelling in the fold of God

[What debtors are ye to the grace which brought you to the knowledge of Christ!—

And what inestimable blessings are you now made to enjoy!—

Yet these are only an earnest of the blessings that await you hereafter—

Rich as your present pastures are, they are not to be compared with those above—

Let nothing tempt you then to wander from the fold to which you are brought—

Yield not to those who are but “goats,” or “wolves in sheep’s clothing”—

Let it be your delight to hear your shepherd’s voice, and to follow his steps—

Then shall you be separated from the goats in the day of judgmentⁱ—

And receive from the chief shepherd the portion reserved for you^k—]

^f Acts iv. 12.

^g Luke xiii. 24.

^h Isai. xlv. 17.

ⁱ Matt. xxv. 33.

^k 1 Pet. v. 4.

CCLXV. THE LABOURERS.

Matt. xx. 6, 7. *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

THERE is a manifest sovereignty observable in the dispensations of God’s grace to man—

His

His ways are often unsearchable to us, and even extremely contrary to our natural expectations—

Moral persons are often left to perish in their sins, while the most immoral have been made illustrious monuments of divine mercy—

And the richest rewards have in many instances been bestowed on those, who, according to human apprehensions, appeared the least likely to receive them—

A moral and exemplary youth had deliberately renounced all hopes of an interest in Christ, that he might retain his worldly possessions^a—

Our Lord, in his improvement of this event, declared that many, who, like him, seemed to be *first* in respect to spiritual advantages, would prove *last* in respect to the benefit derived from them—

But none have any right to murmur against God, seeing that he may dispense his blessings as he will—

To illustrate this truth our Lord delivered the parable before us^b—

The part of it just read, suggests to us many important observations

I. The gospel provides for men a daily and laborious employment

We need not speak of a Christian's work in general—

We shall confine ourselves to the figure of a labourer in a vineyard

[A labourer must first clear his ground from briars and noxious weeds—

He must then dig up the earth, and endeavour to fertilize it with manure^c—

After that he must carefully select his plants, and put them into the ground—

He has then to water them, and to prune the luxuriant branches^d—

And finally, he must keep up the fences that nothing enter to destroy them^e—

If the Christian's duties accord not with his in respect of order, yet they are the same in substance—

He must root out of his soul all earthly, sensual and devilish affections—

If

^a Matt. xix. 21, 22.

^b Compare Matt. xix. 30. with xx. 16.

^c Luke xiii. 8.

^d John xv. 2.

^e Isai. v. 2—6. xxvii. 3.

If his open gross sins be not mortified, no heavenly plant can grow within him—

He must dig deep into the recesses of his heart, and not be satisfied with a slight and superficial work—

Without much meditation, and diligent self-examination, he can never know the desperate wickedness and deceitfulness of his own heart—

Nor must he expect fruit from the unimproved energy of the natural soil—

He must get his soul ameliorated and enriched with the grace of God—

He must apply to his Lord for plants of heavenly growth—

Above all, he must be careful to possess “THE PLANT OF RENOWN^f”—

Without this, no other valuable plant will ever thrive^g—

With this, humility, meekness, love, &c. will spring up, and flourish—

Nor must he forget to water these plants with his prayers and tears—

However fruitful he be, he will find reason enough to weep for his unfruitfulness—

He will also find many luxuriant branches which require to be pruned—

Lastly, he must remember that his adversary will be glad to spoil his labour—

He must therefore fence every good desire with constant watchfulness^h—

This, it must be confessed, is a difficult and laborious task—

It cannot be performed without much diligence and self-denial—

But he who prescribes the duty will assist us to perform itⁱ—

And, as it is fit, he informs us of our work before he hires us into his service—]

Had the gospel its full effect upon us, it would lead us to fulfil these duties as cheerfully as Adam wrought in cultivating the garden of Eden

II. However long we may have been idle hitherto, it now calls us to begin our labour

The parable in its primary sense relates to the Jews and Gentiles

[The

^f Ezek. xxxiv. 29. This certainly refers to Christ. See ver. 23, 24. of that chapter.

^g “Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith.” “Christ in us is the hope of glory.” “Without him we can do nothing;” “through him, all things.”

^h Eph. vi. 12, 16, 18.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 26.

[The patriarchs, together with Moses, the prophets, John Baptist, and Christ himself, had sought in their successive ages to engage the Jews in their proper work—

Thus the Jews had been called, as it were, at the third, sixth, and ninth hours—

The Gentiles, who had hitherto been overlooked, were now to be invited at the eleventh hour—]

But it may also be applied to individuals of every description

[The occasion on which it was spoken relates equally to all^k—

And persons of different ages or circumstances may fitly represent the different hours—

Some, like Samuel and Timothy, enter into the service of their God in very early life^l—

Happy indeed are they; and thankful should they be for the grace that inclined their hearts—

Others have attained a considerable age before they begin their appointed work—

What reason have they to bless God for having subdued their reluctant spirits!—

But many are now arrived at “the eleventh hour”—

All who are far advanced in life are certainly of this description—

They too, who are weak and sickly, are probably drawing to the close of their day—

Yea, there may be some whose day of grace is nearly terminated, while they are yet in full vigour both of body and mind—

Surely all such persons may well conceive themselves to be addressed in the text—]

To us then is the invitation of the gospel now sent

[The Saviour’s voice to every one of us is, “Go into my vineyard”—

He justly expostulates with us, “Why stand ye here all the day idle?”—

Nor can any of us offer that excuse that might be justly urged by the Gentiles—

We have received numberless calls to enter into the service of our God^m—

If we delay therefore any longer we shall be utterly without excuse—

We

^k Matt. xix. 29.

^l The hours are reckoned from six in the morning, that is, from sun-rise to sun-set; so that the third hour is early in the day.

^m Rom. x. 21.

We know indeed that they, who dislike God's service, will find pleas enow for declining itⁿ—

But have we provided an excuse that will be accepted in the day of judgment?—

If so, we may go on securely in our career of sin—

But if not, let us not, by hardening our hearts, provoke God finally to exclude us^o—

It is in vain to urge, that we are incapable of performing the work assigned us—

To the weakest person upon earth God will assuredly fulfil that promise^p—

If indeed we attempt to serve him in our own strength, we must expect to fail—

Nor, if we only engage *occasionally* in his work, can we hope to succeed—

Every intermission renders our task so much the more difficult—

A vineyard long neglected will afford more trouble to the labourer—

But if we *regularly* persevere in duty, our labour will be light and easy^q—

Let us then be thankful that the invitation is sent us at this late hour—

And let the account once given of the Jews now be realized amongst us^r—]

That this invitation may not be slighted as others have been, we observe

III. To every one that will labour in earnest, the gospel promises a suitable reward

We must not suppose that the same reward will be given to all persons

[The Jews had borne the burthen of the ceremonial law—

And the Gentiles, though delivered from that yoke, are made fully equal with them—

This is the circumstance referred to in the parable, and which so offended the Jews^s—

But to us there will be given a recompence according to our works^t—

Not that the reward will be bestowed for any *merit* that is in us^u—

The

ⁿ I must attend to my worldly business; I have a family to provide for, &c.

^o Heb. iii. 7—11.

^p Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^q Matt. xi. 30.

^r Luke xvi. 16.

^s Ver. 11. 15.

^t 2 Cor. v. 10.

^u Rom. iii. 27. iv. 4, 5. xi. 6.

The happiness of heaven will be altogether the gift of God for Christ's sake ^x—

Nevertheless God of his infinite goodness will reward us *in proportion to our labour* ^y—]

To every one will be given "whatsoever is right," and equitable

[If none shall have room to boast, so none shall have reason to repine—

The lowest degrees of happiness shall infinitely exceed any thing we could claim—

Every vessel too shall be full; though all have not the same dimensions—

The word of God is pledged that not the smallest service shall be unrewarded ^z—

We may rest assured therefore that we shall find his promise true ^a—]

ADDRESS

1. To loiterers

[What readiness would you not shew if a great *earthly* recompence were tendered you!—

And will you draw back when all the glory of heaven is offered you?—

Would the devils and damned spirits regard the overtures of mercy as you have done?—

O think, how soon "the night is coming in which no man can work!"—

Think, how awful will be the doom of the wicked and slothful servant!—

And instantly begin the Lord's work, that you may at last receive his wages—]

2. To labourers

[Ye serve the best of masters, and have the most honourable of all employments—

Doubtless ye see but too much reason to lament your unprofitableness—

But God is not extreme to mark what is omitted or done amiss—

If ye really make it "your meat to do his will," be of good cheer—

The evening, when your labours will end, is fast approaching—

Then shall you be called into the presence of your Lord and Master—

Not

^x Rom. vi. 23.

^z 1 Cor. xv. 58. Matt. x. 42.

^y 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^a Prov. xi. 18.

Not the least or most unworthy of you all shall be overlooked by him—

Be not weary then of well doing, for you shall all reap in due season^b—

To every one of you shall those delightful words be addressed^c—]

^b Gal. vi. 9.

^c Matt. xxv. 21.

CCLXVI. THE POUNDS.

Luke xix. 12, 13.—*A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.*

MANKIND are prone to amuse themselves with prospects of earthly grandeur—

And to neglect the most important ends and purposes of life—

The Jews were expecting their Messiah to erect a temporal kingdom—

The disciples themselves also were led away by this fond conceit—

At our Lord's last ascent to Jerusalem, this expectation prevailed amongst all orders and ranks of men^a—

To rectify their notions and turn their attention to their proper concerns, he delivered to them this parable^b—

Christ is the person here intended by the nobleman—

He has committed to every man something which is to be improved for him—

And he is shortly coming at the day of judgment to reckon with us—

These points are so clear that we need insist on them only *in a way of application*

I. Has

^a Ver. 11.

^b The parable states, that a nobleman, after having been invested with royal dignity, reckoned with his servants to whom he had committed money, and punished the citizens who had refused submission to his authority. These being perfectly distinct, we shall treat them separately, and confine our attention at present to the former.

I. Has not Christ given us something to improve for him?

[We are ready enough to fix an high value on what we possess, when we think it will reflect honour on ourselves—

But we are apt to think lightly of it, when we are reminded of the responsibility connected with it—

Few indeed have great talents or extensive influence—

But every person has at least a pound^c committed to him—

Have we not, in the first place, been endued with *reason*?—

This surely is capable of great improvement—

Have we not also enjoyed many *sabbaths* and *ordinances*?—

These might have been turned to a good account for God—

Have we not also had access to the *holy scriptures*?—

From these we might have learned all the mysteries of godliness—

We should therefore have studied them with all humility and diligence—

Have we not experienced many *convictions of conscience*, and gracious *operations of God's spirit*?—

These are inestimable, and may be made subservient to our eternal welfare—

Have we not received many *calls and warnings* from God in his *Providence*?—

These, if duly attended to, might have been occasions of much good to our souls—

And all these things are mercies, of which we must hereafter give an account—]

II. What improvement have we made of his favours?

[The injunction given to all, is, "Occupy, that is, Trade, till I come"—

And all these things are given us to be improved for God^d—

What use then have we made of the pound committed to us?—

Have we employed our *reason* in search of divine truth?—

Have we spent our *sabbaths* in meditation and prayer?—

Have we profited by the *ordinances* as we might have done?—

Have we taken the *scriptures* as a guide to our feet and lantern to our path?—

Have we obeyed the dictates of *conscience*, and the motions of *God's spirit*?—

Have we laid to heart the various dispensations of *Providence*, which we observed in our own concerns, and in the world around us?—

Have

^c The value of the mina is not ascertained. Some think it was equal to about *three* guineas; others, that it was rather more than *five*.

^d 1 Cor. xii. 7.

Have we, in short, laboured to improve our *time*, our *money*, our *influence* for him who has entrusted them to our care?—

Have we laboured earnestly to fulfil that apostolic injunction^e?—]

III. What excuse have we for neglecting to improve them?

[The slothful servant cast the blame upon his lord—

Nor are there wanting amongst ourselves those who resemble him—

We say, God requires more than he will enable us to perform—

But can this be affirmed with even a shadow of truth?—

Do not his promises extend to all our wants?—

May not every one adopt the words of the apostle Paul^f?—

Even if this assertion were true, it would not justify our supineness—

The more “austere” our Lord were, the more we should fear to provoke him—

We should endeavour at least to approve ourselves to him as well as we could—

If we could not do *all*, it is no reason that we should do *nothing*—

If we could not improve his money by trading, we should “put it into the bank”—

Our excuses then will only turn to our own confusion—

God will justly say to us, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee”]

IV. What recompence have we reason to expect?

[Our Lord will reward every man according to his works—

Are we ready then to give up our account to him?—

Can we say, “Lord, thy pound hath gained *ten*, or *five* pounds?”—

Can we say upon good grounds that it hath gained even *two*?—

Happy for us, if we have the testimony of our conscience respecting this—

We shall gladly, like the good servants, ascribe the honour to our Lord^g—

We shall adopt the language of the apostle^h, and of Davidⁱ—

Nor

^e 1 Pet. iv. 10.

^f Phil. iv. 13.

^g They do not say *I* have gained, but, “*Thy pound*” hath gained: they knew and acknowledged that they had *nothing of their own* to trade with.

^h 1 Cor. xv. 10.

ⁱ 1 Chron. xxix. 14.

Nor will our Lord be backward to reward our faithful exertions—

He will recompense every one in proportion to his labour and success^k—

And to every one he will give what infinitely exceeds the value of his services^l—

But, alas! are there not many who have hid their money in a napkin?—

What recompence then must such slothful servants receive?

Christ will shortly deprive them of *the means of grace* they possess—

And make them monuments of his everlasting displeasure—

Nor will this be the reward of those only who *dissipate* his money—

It will be the certain recompence of *unprofitableness*—

Let not any one therefore hope to be approved while he continues idle—

Let not any one be satisfied with a mere negative holiness—

Let our exertions in our Master's service be unwearied—

Let us, like the saints of old, look to the recompence of reward^m—

And let us stand ready to give up our account with joy—

So shall we have confidence before him, and not be ashamed at his comingⁿ—]

^k 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^l The government of five or ten cities is a rich compensation indeed for the improvement of one pound.

^m Heb. xi. 26.

ⁿ 1 John ii. 28.

CCLXVII. THE REBELLIOUS CITIZENS.

Luke xix. 12, 14. *A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return—But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.*

THERE is scarce any one to be found who does not think he loves God—

Men form an erroneous notion of his perfections, and then approve of him—

But, if they heard his character fully stated, they would turn away with disgust—

Thus the Jews thought they should heartily welcome their Messiah—

But

But when he declared his kingdom was not of this world, they hated and despised him —

Of this, together with the consequences of their conduct, Jesus warned them in the parable before us ^a—

To elucidate this subject we shall consider

I. The nobleman's departure

The person intended by the nobleman is Christ

[It is not necessary to look for any hidden meaning in the title ^b—

Yet to whom can it so properly be applied as to *the only-begotten Son of God*?—]

His departure relates to the ascension of Christ to heaven

[The chief seat of power in our Lord's time was Rome—

In allusion to this our Lord speaks of his “going to a far country ^c”—

While on earth he was in a state of humiliation—

Though he was a king he assumed no regal pomp—

On the contrary, he rejected royalty when it was offered him ^d—

He was sometimes even destitute of a place where to lay his head—

But at his ascension he was fully invested with royal dignity ^e—

He was to have all both in heaven and in earth subjected to him ^f—

And at his return to judge the world he will exercise his sovereignty without control—]

In that interval the Jews would shew the disposition of their hearts

II. The conduct of his citizens in his absence

They refused to have him to reign over them

[The Jews professed to wish for the Messiah's kingdom—

But

^a We waive all notice of the nobleman's reckoning with his servants, in order that we may keep the subjects distinct. See the preceding parable.

^b Αἰθιοπίας ἐσθραήτης.

^c At this time both the ecclesiastical and civil governors of Judea were appointed by the Roman emperors, and were often summoned to Rome, either to be confirmed in their authority or to answer for their abuse of it. This being well known among the Jews, the allusion would appear obvious and elegant: but, without adverting to that circumstance, we cannot so easily see *whither* the nobleman should go, or to *whom*.

^d John vi. 15.

^e Acts v. 31.

^f Eph. i. 20—22.

But when it was erected, they opposed it openly—

While our Lord was among them “ they would have no king but Cæsar ”—

They put Jesus to death for affirming that he was a king—

And they maintained the same opposition to his kingdom after his ascension—

They opposed it deliberately, virulently, and with one consent ^g—]

Such also is the conduct of many in this day

[Many avow their hatred of the Redeemer’s kingdom—

And every man by nature is an enemy to it in his heart—

The language of our hearts accords with that of the rebellious citizens—

We do not like to “ take on us Christ’s light and easy yoke ”—

We esteem his self-denying precepts “ an hard saying ”—

And either openly or secretly we say with Pharaoh ^h—]

But their insolence did not go unpunished

III. His treatment of them on his return

He returned at last with full power to avenge his cause

[Christ also will surely return ere long—

He will then “ come in power and great glory ”—

Nor will any one be able to resist his will—]

He then ordered them to be “ slain before him ”

[He had patiently endured their insolence a long time—

But when forbearance had been exercised in vain, he executed on them the punishment they deserved ⁱ—

Thus our Lord endures *us* also with much long-suffering—

But at his future coming he will bear with us no longer—

He fulfilled indeed this declaration, in part, at the destruction of Jerusalem—

Then were the vials of his wrath poured out upon his enemies—

This however was but an earnest of the miseries he will inflict—

Every rebel at the last day will be summoned to his tribunal—

And they, whom now he would rejoice to save, shall be slain without mercy—

Compassionate as he now is, he will then feel no pity—

But like Joshua (his TYPE) will satisfy his righteous vengeance ^k—]

INFER

^g This is intimated by “ their sending a message after him.”

^h Exod. v. 2.

ⁱ Ver. 27.

^k Josh. x. 24, 26.

INFER

1. How astonishing is the wickedness of the human heart!

[Who would conceive that the Jews should ever have hated Jesus?—

That they should hate one so amiable, so active, so useful?—

In what a light do we view the wickedness of that generation!—

Yet it was not to be compared with that which obtains amongst us—

We see not only the moral qualities of Jesus, but his divine character—

We see him dying under the load of our iniquities—

And “redeeming us to God by his blood”—

Yet we will not submit to him as our sovereign Lord—

Let us confess and lament these rebellious dispositions—

And justify him if he should visit us with the heaviest judgments—]

2. How are we concerned to have this wickedness removed!

[It cannot be supposed that the contemners of Christ's authority should be admitted to his glory—

If indeed we would submit to him, he would receive us to his favour—

But his obstinate opposers shall feel the weight of his displeasure—

Let not any however be dejected because their enmity is not completely slain—

There is some remaining repugnance to his will even in the best of men—

Nor will he be at a loss to distinguish between the opposition which is habitual and indulged, and that which is occasional only, and lamented—

To all who truly labour to serve him he will fulfil that promise¹—

But while we would comfort the feeble-minded, we must caution the presumptuous—

Let not any harden themselves like those scoffers^m—

The Lord will surely come in due seasonⁿ—

Let us rather improve this day of acceptance and salvation—

Let us yield up ourselves unfeignedly to his government—

And let us address him like those penitents of old^o—]

¹ John xii. 26.

ⁿ 2 Pet. iii. 9, 10.

^m 2 Pet. iii. 4.

^o Isai. xxvi. 13.

CCLXVIII. THE TWO SONS.

Matt. xxi. 28--31. *But what think you? A certain man had two sons, and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterwards he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go Sir; and went not. Whither of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*

INVETERATE prejudice is scarcely ever to be overcome by the plainest arguments—

There is no action, however praiseworthy, which it will not condemn—

Nor any reasoning, however conclusive, which it will not obstinately resist—

The best way to conquer it is by secret and indirect attacks—

This method our Lord frequently adopted, when every other had been tried in vain—

The Pharisees, unconvinced by all our Lord's miracles, demanded by what authority he had presumed to purge the temple—

Our Lord offered to satisfy their demand, if they would first inform him from whence John had derived his authority to administer baptism—

They, aware of the drift of his question, and that in replying to it they must condemn themselves, declined giving him any **direct** answer—

Our Lord, seeing their perverseness, changed his mode of dealing with them—

And drew from them an involuntary acknowledgment of their guilt, by means of a less obvious but well-adjusted parable—

In opening the parable we shall

I. Compare the conduct of the two sons

The first of them represented the state of those to whom John had preached

[His father ordered him to "go and work in his vineyard"—

This command he peremptorily refused to comply with—

But, on further consideration, "repented" of his misconduct, "and went"—

Thus many of the Baptist's hearers were of an abandoned character—

They, by their lives, had shewed an utter contempt for the will of God—

But they were soon brought to a sense of their undone condition—

They thankfully embraced the mercy which that faithful preacher announced to them—

And submitted to his baptism in token of their unfeigned contrition—]

The second represented the Pharisees whom our Lord was addressing

[He promised a ready and unreserved obedience to his father's will—

But never truly engaged in executing the work assigned him—

Thus the Pharisees professed much reverence and respect for God—

They wished to be thought his dutiful and obedient children—

But they would not really devote themselves to his service—

What might suit their own inclination and redound to their own credit they would do—

But they would not enter into the vineyard which he required them to cultivate—

They would not submit to the humiliating doctrines which John had preached—

Nor accept that salvation which was offered them by Christ himself ^a—]

Both of them are just emblems of many living characters

[There are many who have lived in the violation of all God's commands—

The constant language of their hearts has been that of rebellion against him ^b—

But, by the grace of God, they have been convinced of their sin—

They have deeply bewailed all their former iniquities—

They

^a John vii. 37, 38, 48. There may be a further reference in the text to the rejection of the gospel by the hypocritical Jews, and the reception of it among the idolatrous Gentiles.

^b Ps. xii. 4.

They have sought for mercy through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus—

And have shewn the truth of their repentance by the renovation of their lives—

Others there are, who have been sober and moral in their conduct—

They profess to respect all the commands of their heavenly Father—

But they rest in “the form, while destitute of the power of godliness”—

They neglect the duties of “repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus”—

They will not be prevailed on to look to “Christ for all their righteousness and strength”—

In short, “they are whole, and see no need of a physician”—

Hence, though amiable in themselves, they are “enemies of the cross of Christ”—]

On a comparison of the two, the latter appears decidedly the better character

[*The former* manifested indeed at first the greatest impiety—

And might justly have been dismissed for ever from his father’s house—

But his subsequent repentance altogether altered his character—

And his obedience arising from it proved him to have attained a becoming sense of his duty—

On the other hand, *the latter* was “an hypocrite in heart”—

His fair promises only added to the guilt of his disobedience—

And his continued violation of them constituted him a most worthless character—

Our Lord referred it to the Pharisees themselves to decide their comparative merits—

They instantly gave their testimony in favour of the former—

Nor could prejudice itself withhold its assent in so clear a case—]

Having determined this point, we shall proceed, in imitation of our Lord, to

II. Make some observations resulting from that comparison

The Pharisees did not immediately see for what end our Lord put to them that question—

But, by their answer to that, many important truths are established

1. It is not always the most specious character that is most likely to go to heaven

[Far be it from us to plead for wickedness of any kind—

It is certainly better to be moral and sober, than immoral and profane—

It is better to be a decent Pharisee than to be numbered with “publicans and harlots”—

But it is no less certain that moral persons are apt to pride themselves in their virtue—

They cannot endure to be told that they deserve the divine displeasure—

And, that they must be as much indebted to divine grace as the very vilest of mankind—

They think they may place some dependence at least on their own works—

Nor will they submit to the painful necessity of making “Christ their all”—

But more notorious sinners are more easily convinced of sin—

They see at once that they can have no righteousness of their own—

And, when humbled for their iniquities, gladly embrace the gospel-salvation—

Thus it was with the different hearers of John the Baptist^c—

And thus it was in the apostolic, and all succeeding ages^d—

Let us then endeavour to bear in mind that caution of Solomon^e—

And thankfully accept mercy on the terms offered to us in the gospel—]

2. The characters of men will not be determined by their words, but by their actions

[In some sense indeed, it is true, that “by our words we shall be condemned or justified^f”—

But God will not be deceived by any fair promises or transient intentions—

We may say, I go, Sir; but he will enquire, Whether we really go—

Nor will he regard our professions of love and service, if in works we deny him—

It is the penitent and obedient, not the hypocritical and deceitful son, that he will accept—

Let none then rest in confessions of faith or promises of obedience—

Let every one enquire, Am I now working for God in his appointed way?—

Let

^c Luke vii. 29, 30. and Matt. xxi. 32.

^d Rom. ix. 30—32.

^e Prov. xxx. 12.

^f Matt. xii. 37.

Let us not ask, Am I doing as much as others? but "*What do I more than others?*"—

Am I *more* humble, *more* meek, *more* dead to the world, *more* exercised in spiritual things, &c.?—

This is the test by which God will judge us in the last day—

Let us then try ourselves by this rule, that we may know our true character—

Nor let us think ourselves right because we once appeared earnest in doing the Lord's will—

Let us remember the plain declarations of God concerning us^g—

And let us expect reward or punishment according to the verdict of his word and of our own conscience^h—]

3. The most daring rebel, if he truly repent, shall be accepted of God

[This is a most delightful and encouraging truth to a sincere penitent—

It is ascertained beyond a doubt from the parable before us—

It has been exemplified in numberless, and authentic, instancesⁱ—

And it shall be realized at this hour to those who truly desire it—

However open, heinous, or deliberate our offences have been, they shall be forgiven^k—

The vineyard is yet open, and the command of God is, Go work in it—

Let publicans and harlots hear the voice of our common Father—

Let them be assured, that their past iniquities shall be no more remembered^l—

And that every thing they do for God shall be accepted of him—

If only they believe in Christ, and engage in his service, they need not fear—

While unbelieving Pharisees shall be cast out, they shall find favour in God's sight—

O that these blessed tidings may be welcomed as they deserve!^m—

Let not any say, TO-MORROW I will regard my Father's command—

His voice to every one is, Go, work TO-DAY in my vine yard—

None of us can tell what may be on the morrow—

Let

^g Matt. vii. 21. Ezek. xviii. 21, 22. 24.

^h 1 John iii. 20, 21.

ⁱ Manasseh, 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. Luke vii. 47.

^k Isai. i. 18.

^l Heb. viii. 12.

Let none then presume to defer this necessary work—

God himself most solemnly cautions us against delay^m—

To every one of you therefore do we address the apostle's exhortationⁿ—

And we pray God that ye may not only say, Lord, Lord, but do his will—]

^m Heb. iii. 13, 15.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 2.

CCLXIX. THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

Luke xx. 15. *So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?*

WHEN the mind is unbiassed, it can easily discern between truth and error, especially where the grounds of judgment are clear and strong. But where persons are under the influence of prejudice or worldly interest, they are blind to the most obvious conclusions, and obstinately tenacious of the most absurd opinions. Hence our Lord spake so much in parables; because his adversaries, not aware of their drift at first, were easily brought to acknowledge things, which, if more plainly delivered, would have excited the most inveterate opposition. In this manner he gained their assent to the equity of God in executing the heaviest judgments on themselves and their whole nation

This was the scope of the parable before us; in opening which, we shall shew

I. In whom it is accomplished

It was manifestly fulfilled in those to whom it was spoken

[God had planted his church among the Jews, and had cultivated it with peculiar care^a. From it he expected a revenue of honour and glory: and when the people were forgetful to pay it, he sent his prophets to remind them of their duty, and to stir them up to the performance of it. But they abused his messengers in every successive age, and beat them, and sent them away empty. He, however, averse to punish them

^a Isai. v. 1—4.

them as they deserved, sent, last of all, his Son, in hopes that, when they should see his exalted dignity, his clear credentials, and his unbounded benevolence, they would reverence and obey him. But they, wishing to retain undisturbed possession of their lusts, determined to cast him out and kill him. And though, when warned that they would do so, they exclaimed, God forbid that we should treat the Messiah thus^b, they actually fulfilled the parable within the space of three days, and put to death God's only-begotten Son.]

But it is also accomplished in *us*

[It is true that we cannot crucify him as the Jews did, because he is not within our reach; but nevertheless we cast him out with as much indignity as ever they did. He is here, as he was among them, "the man whom the nation abhors:" he is "despised and rejected of men." How is he treated by *the ungodly and profane*? When he comes to them in the ministry of the word, and demands their hearts for God, do they not thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us^c? We will not have this man to reign over us^d? And how do *the self-righteous moralists* regard him? When he calls them to build on him as the only foundation of their hopes, do they not make him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence^e? Do they not persist in going about to establish their own righteousness, instead of thankfully submitting to his^f? Among his very followers too, are there not many *self-deceiving professors*, who acknowledge him in words, but in works deny him^g? If others crucify him more openly, these, like Judas, betray him with a kiss. Lastly, what shall be said of *vile apostates*, who having once embraced his cause, decline from his ways, and go back unto the world? Are we not expressly told, that they crucify him afresh^h, and "tread him under foot?" By all of these then is Jesus cast out of the vineyard, as much as ever he was by the Jews of old.]

Let us then consider attentively

II. What portion such persons must expect

The Jews, as our Lord foretold, were visited with the heaviest calamities

[They, when interrogated by our Lord, confessed what such labourers must expect at the hands of their lordⁱ. And behold, it happened to them according to their word. That generation was not passed away, before their city was burnt up,

^b Ver. 16.

^c Rom. ix. 30—34.

^d Heb. vi. 6.

^e Acts vii. 27.

^f Rom. x. 3.

^g Luke xix. 14.

^h Tit. i. 16.

ⁱ Matt. xxi. 41.

up, their people were massacred without distinction, and their whole polity, civil and religious, was dissolved. Nor can any one reflect on their treatment of their Messiah, without acknowledging the equity of those unparalleled judgments that were inflicted on them.]

Most assuredly too the wrath of God must await those who condemn him now

[Let our Lord's appeal be considered, "What shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?" Would any rational person imagine that he should shew kindness to such obstinate transgressors? Do we not see immediately that God must be incensed against them? must he not be displeased with those who withhold from him the tribute of their love? Must he not be indignant also that his messages of mercy are so continually slighted? And above all, must not the contempt poured upon his only dear Son, provoke him to anger? What can we expect, but that his wrath should wax hot against us, and "burn even to the lowest hell^k?" Let any one impartially consider the ingratitude and impiety of such conduct, and he will confess that the everlasting punishment of such offenders is no more than adequate to their desert^l.]

Let us then LEARN from this parable

1. That we are accountable to God for all the advantages we enjoy

[If God has made us his vineyard, and bestowed culture upon us, doubtless such a favour entails upon us an obligation to love and serve him. And if he have sent a succession of faithful servants to remind us of our duty, and direct us in the performance of it, this also calls for correspondent acknowledgements from us. Above all, if he have sent us his only dear Son, not only to instruct us, but to die for us, we should be incessantly filled with admiration of his love, and zeal in his service. But these very mercies, if overlooked and despised, will bring upon us the heavier indignation. Think then for how many things you are indebted to God; and begin immediately to render to him his dues. That which, above all, he requires is, the tribute of a grateful heart. O that he may receive it daily from us; and that we may devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit!]

2. That we are peculiarly responsible for our treatment of Jesus Christ

[Christ is the Father's greatest gift. Our past abuse of all his other mercies may be forgiven, provided we be duly sensible

^k Deut. xxxii. 22.

^l Heb. ii. 3. and x. 28, 29.

sensible of this mercy. However long we have alienated God's property, yea, however shamefully we have abused his other messengers, if now we repent us of our sins, and turn to him in the name of Jesus, he will pardon our past transgressions, and remember our iniquities no more. But, if we continue to slight the Saviour, all other changes will be to no purpose. We may turn from profaneness to morality, or may even profess a regard for Jesus himself, yet if we do not cordially receive him for all the ends and purposes for which he was sent into the world, we shall only deceive ourselves to our eternal ruin. Let us then "look on him whom we have pierced, and mourn." Then shall God's indignation be turned to love; and we shall be made partakers of his eternal inheritance.]

CCLXX. THE REJECTED CORNER STONE.

Luke xx. 17, 18. *And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

MANY truths delivered by our Lord militated strongly against the carnal notions of his hearers—They were ready on many occasions to reply, This is an hard saying, who can hear it?—But he invariably appealed to their own scriptures in confirmation of his word—Nor could any better method of silencing their objections be possibly devised—He had just warned the priests and elders that they would kill their Messiah; and that God would on that account transfer his church to the Gentiles^a—They, not conceiving that either of those events could ever take place, cried, God forbid—Our Lord, in reply, referred them to their own scriptures—And added a most awful declaration of his own, in order that he might impress the passage more deeply on their minds—We shall consider

I. The passage appealed to

The

^a Ver. 13—16.

The words in their primary sense refer to David^b—

But they most undoubtedly have a reference to Christ also

[Christ is represented in scripture as the stone that should both *support* and *connect* the church of God^c—And the passage referred to in the text, particularly declared, that he should be rejected by the very persons whose duty it was to *edify* and build up the church—It announced however the determination of God to frustrate their designs—And to establish him as the head of the corner in spite of all their endeavours to destroy him—In this view the passage is quoted no less than *six* times in the New Testament—And its full accomplishment was triumphantly proclaimed before the very builders who had rejected him^d—]

The particular manner in which our Lord appealed to them is worthy of notice

[He “beheld” the objectors with a mixture of indignation and pity—He referred them to the words as to a passage well known among them, and generally considered even among themselves as applicable to the Messiah—His very look, together with the pointed manner of his address, intimated to them, that they were at that moment ignorantly fulfilling that prophecy—And that nothing but the most inveterate prejudice could induce them to persist one moment longer in such glaring impiety—]

The importance of this appeal will more strongly appear, if we consider

II. The declaration founded upon it

The latter part of the text is understood by most as intimating the more aggravated punishment that persecutors would incur beyond that of common believers^e—Perhaps we may rather understand it as importing

1. That

^b David's establishment on the throne of Israel had been opposed to the uttermost: Saul had laboured incessantly to kill him: after the death of Saul, two tribes only acknowledged him as their king: it was seven years before the other tribes became subject to him: and then all the surrounding nations sought his destruction. But God made him triumphant over all: in remembrance of which mercy he penned the words before us. See Ps. cxviii. 10, 22.

^c Isai. xxviii. 16.

^d Acts ii. 36. and iv. 11, 12.

^e They suppose also that there is an allusion to the manner in which persons were stoned to death, viz. by casting them down first upon a large stone, and then throwing large stones upon them.

1. That all, who stumble at Christ, greatly endanger their own souls

[Many are the grounds of offence which Christ affords to proud and ungodly men—To some the sublimity, to others the simplicity, to some the strictness, and to others the grace of his gospel, becomes a stumbling-block—Hence some professedly “deny the Lord who bought them,” while others, “call him Lord, but will not do what he commands”—These equally stumble at Christ himself^f—And as he who falls upon a great stone, will bruise and maim his body, so does he who thus stumbles at Christ wound his own soul^g—Solomon, expressly speaking of Christ, attests this awful truth^h—]

2. That they who provoke him to cut them off in their impenitence, will perish certainly and without a remedy

[Many have rejected him for a season, and found acceptance with him at last—But they who abide in unbelief must inevitably perish—The despised Jesus will fall upon them at the last day, and grind them to powder—The weight of rocks and mountains would not more effectually crush a potter’s vessel, than he will his obstinate and unbelieving enemiesⁱ—]

Surely this is a declaration which deserves the deepest attention

[They, who oppose the truth of Christ, think that they shall retard his work—At least they do not apprehend that they shall endanger themselves—But they “kick against the pricks^k”—As well may persons hope to wound a rock by casting themselves down upon it, as that they shall ever prevail against the church of Christ—The injury will ultimately be sustained by themselves alone—The voice of God therefore in the text is like that of David, Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way^l—]

ADVICES

1. Attend diligently to every word of God which ye read or hear!

[The knowledge, which the Jews had by means of the scriptures, rendered their guilt in rejecting Christ incomparably more heinous than that of the Roman soldiers—And we who enjoy the still clearer light of the New Testament, must contract tenfold guilt if we reject him—How shall we be able to endure that appeal which will be made to us in the day of judgment, “Were not such and such things written respecting me? were not my invitations, promises, and expostulations set before you?”

^f 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^g What pangs of conscience, and dread of death and judgment, do such persons experience!

^h Prov. viii. 30, 36. ⁱ Ps. ii. 9. ^k Acts ix. 5. ^l Ps. ii. 12.

ye were you not forewarned of the evils which a rejection of me would bring upon you?" — — — Give earnest heed then to the word ye hear, lest, instead of proving a savour of life unto life, it become a savour of death unto death^m—]

2. Examine carefully what regard ye are paying to Christ

[All do not make him the head of the corner—Many reject him still—If we be not with him, we are against himⁿ—All that disobey him, as truly stumble at him, as if they were his avowed enemies^o—Enquire then whether ye make him the foundation whereon ye build, and the corner-stone that unites you in love to every part of God's spiritual temple—By this must ye know that ye are his true disciples—]

3. Be thankful if you have attained even the smallest knowledge of Christ!

[There is no hope whatever for those, who in a Christian land die ignorant of Christ^p—But they who know him have nothing to fear—To them is promised eternal life^q—When the whole assembly of the ungodly shall be banished from his presence, they shall stand with great boldness^r—When the wicked will be crying to the rocks and mountains to fall upon them, the followers of the Lamb will be triumphing in their God—This promise is sure to all the seed^s—Let Jesus then be more precious to all our souls—Let us willingly consent to his being the head of the corner—Let us, as lively stones, ever seek to be built up upon him^t—And though we should be despised and rejected like him, let us never be ashamed of owning him as all our salvation and all our desire—]

^m 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 8.

^q John xvii. 3.

^s Rom. ix. 33.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 30.

^p 2 Thess. i. 8.

^r 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.

^t 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

CCLXXI. THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

Matt. xxii. 2, 3. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, who made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.*

INSTRUCTION and reproof generally irritate those who will not be reformed—

But ministers must "speak plainly, whether men will hear or forbear"—

They must present the same truths in various shapes, if by any means they may win the souls of their hearers—

Nor should they be intimidated even by the most imminent dangers—

Jesus had spoken a parable that greatly offended the Pharisees—

They even sought to take away his life on account of it—

But he still persisted in his benevolent labours for their good—

And repeated the same offensive truths in the parable before us—

We shall confine our attention to its two leading features

I. The glorious representation here given of the gospel

Some of the parables are simple—This is rather complex—

1. It compares the gospel to the marriage of a king's son

[God is that "certain king, who makes a marriage for his son"—

Christ, his only Son is the bridegroom, and the church is his bride—

This similitude frequently occurs in the prophetic writings^a—

Nor is the use of it uncommon in the New Testament also^b—

St. Paul intimates that there is a strict analogy between the relation of a man to his wife, and of Christ to his church^c—

The gospel is the means of bringing us into that relation to Christ—

It commends to us his excellencies, and fills our hearts with love to him—

When we accept his offers, we give up ourselves entirely to him—

We engage to love, honour, and obey him with our whole hearts—

On the other hand he gives himself to us as our protector—

We have communion with him in all which he himself possesses^d—

Through him we become children of his heavenly Father^e—

And

^a Isai. liv. 5. Jer. iii. 14.

^b Matt. ix. 15.

^c Eph. v. 32.

^d John xvii. 22.

^e Gal. iii. 26.

And joint-heirs, together with himself, of an eternal inheritance^f—

The present time indeed is only the season of our espousals^g—

The consummation of the nuptials is reserved for a future period^h—

But the engagement made shall never be dissolvedⁱ—]

2. It compares the gospel to a feast instituted in honour of that marriage

[In this feast “the oxen and fatlings, and all other things are ready”—

There is nothing wanting that can conduce to the welfare of any guest—

Are we strong and of full age? there is strong meat set before us^k—

Are we weak and only babes in Christ? there is milk proper for us^l—

Are we hungering after pardon? there is an abundance for all^m—

Are we thirsting for peace? it flows down there as a riverⁿ—

Are we panting for holiness? the spirit of holiness is there poured out^o—

Whatever be our state, there are provisions suited to us—

There are “exceeding great and precious promises” extending to every want^p—

And the banquet, suited to the dignity of the king, will be prolonged to all eternity^q—

This feast is made on occasion of the church’s union with Christ—

And we, who, *collectively*, are the bride, are *individually*, the guests—]

Such representations might well engage our regard to the gospel

But we shall see reason for nothing but grief, while we consider

II. The reception which the gospel meets with in the world

The invitations of the gospel are sent equally to all

[Not a creature in the universe is excepted as unworthy—
The

^f Rom. viii. 17

^g Jer. ii. 2. 2 Cor. xi. 2.

^h Rev. xix. 7.

ⁱ Hos. ii. 19, 20.

^k Heb. v. 14.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^m Matt. xii. 31.

ⁿ Isai. xlvi. 18.

^o Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^p 2 Pet. i. 4.

^q Rev. vii. 16, 17. Comp. Esth. i. 3, 4.

The more unworthy we feel ourselves to be, the more acceptable guests we shall be accounted by the king—

We are even solicited to become the bride of the king's son—

Though we be in the most loathsome condition, he will not despise us^r—

He will adorn and beautify us that we may be fit for his presence^s—

And rejoice over us as a bridegroom over his beloved bride^t—]

But the generality treat these invitations with scorn and indifference

[The prophets and apostles were God's messengers to mankind—

They came to declare the goodness of God to our fallen race—

And to urge men to accept his proffered mercies—

But the world persecuted them even unto death^u—

This enmity indeed is at present kept within bounds by human laws, and the superintending providence of God—

Nevertheless it exists as strongly as ever in the carnal heart—

And, when permitted, will rage again with equal fury—

Men's hatred of the gospel is not less evidently shewn by their neglect of it—

They "make light of it" as though it did not concern them—

The concerns of this life are constantly urged as an excuse for their conduct^x—

But the truth is declared in the text, "They will not come"—

They are so *occupied with carnal things* that they have *no taste for those that are spiritual*—

And so *wedded to this world* that they have *no desire for an union with Christ*—]

In due time however they will meet with the recompence they deserve

[When "the wedding is filled with guests" the doors will be shut—

The persecutors of God's messengers will then suffer in their turn^y—

Dreadful was the vengeance inflicted on the Jewish nation—

But far more dreadful will be their punishment in the last day—

The contemners of God's mercy also will be excluded from the banquet—

They

^r Ezek. xvi. 5, 6, 8.

^t Isai. lxii. 5.

^x Ver. 5.

^s Ib. 9—14.

^u Ver. 6.

^y Ver. 7.

They who would not *feast now* with him, shall not *then* so much as *taste* of his bounties—

And they who would not become his *bride*, shall be treated as his *enemies*—]

INFER

1. How inconceivably great is the honour and happiness of God's people !

[It would be thought a great matter to be invited to a royal banquet—

And still more to be united to the son and heir of a monarch—

But how contemptible are such honours when compared with the Christian's !—

Let us not rest satisfied with earthly comforts or distinctions—

Let our ambition soar to the highest heavens—

Let us affect an union with the Lamb of God himself—

And seek a participation of his blessedness and glory—]

2. How astonishing is the infatuation of the careless world !

[If we offered them carnal enjoyments they would have ears to hear—

But they seem wholly insensible to spiritual objects, however great—

If the things set before them were either trivial or uncertain, or, if they might be neglected with impunity, we might account for their supineness—

But there is no room for any surmises of this kind—

Let us then awake from our slumber, and cry mightily to God—

Thus we may even yet realize the figures we have now considered—]

CCLXXII. THE WEDDING GARMENT.

Matt. xxii. 11—13. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

THERE has ever been a diversity of characters in the church of God—

This, though much to be lamented, cannot be avoided—

The very zeal which animates the ministers of the gospel, has a tendency to produce this effect—

Their charity prompts them to hope well of all who appear in earnest—

And to admit to their communion those who “witness a good confession”—

Thus it was that “the wedding (in the parable) was furnished with guests”—

But he who searcheth the hearts will distinguish the hypocrites from others—

And will deal with men according to their real characters

This being intimated in the text, we shall consider

I. What we are to understand by the wedding garment

The wedding-feast is intended to represent the blessings of the gospel—

The garment suited to the occasion must therefore import a meetness to partake of those blessings

In this view we may perhaps understand the wedding-garment as signifying *the righteousness of Christ*

[Our blessed Lord wrought out a righteousness by his obedience unto death—

Every believer has this righteousness both given to him, and put upon him^a—

St. Paul abhorred the thought of depending on any other^b—

Nor will any other avail us for our justification before God^c—

Hence we are exhorted to “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ*”^d—

And described as being clothed with him as with a garment^e—

The possession of this garment founds our title to heaven^f—

And is a source of unspeakable joy to the believing soul—

Every one that wears it may well exult with the church of old^g—]

But we must doubtless understand it also as signifying *our own inherent righteousness*

[Moral

^a Rom. iii. 22.

^c Rom. v. 18, 19.

^e Gal. iii. 26, 27.

^b Phil. iii. 9.

^d Rom. xiii. 14.

^f Rev. vii. 14, 15.

^g Isai. lxi. 10.

[Moral qualities are often represented under the figure of a garment^h—

The scripture speaks of them as even constituting the wedding-garmentⁱ—

Nor can there be any doubt but that our meetness for heaven consists in them^k—

On this account we are commanded to “*put on the new man*”^l—

And are cautioned against sin as that which defiles our garments^m—

Without such qualities we can never be admitted to the divine presenceⁿ—

But, if we possess them, we shall surely be counted worthy to enjoy it^o—]

We should however be careful not to confound these two ideas

[The *righteousness of Christ* is necessary to justify us in the sight of God—

And an *inward personal righteousness* is necessary to make us meet for glory—

Neither of these can in anywise be dispensed with—

Yet we should carefully distinguish their respective offices—

We must *not separate* them, as though either were sufficient of itself—

Nor must we *confound* them, as though they were united in procuring the divine favour—

We must guard equally against antinomianism on the one hand, and self-righteousness on the other—

While we trust in Christ *alone* for salvation, we must seek to be renewed after the divine image—

It is in this way only that we can gain admission to the marriage-supper—]

The obtaining of this wedding-garment is of infinite importance

II. What punishment awaits those that are destitute of it

A person habited in mean apparel would not be suffered to continue at the wedding feast of an earthly monarch

Much less shall guilty and polluted souls sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven

[The king, in the parable, was filled with indignation at the intrusion of the unworthy guest—

He

^h Ps. cxxxii. 9. Job xxix. 14.

^k Col. i. 12.

^m Rev. xvi. 15.

ⁱ Rev. xix. 7, 8.

^l Eph. iv. 24.

ⁿ Heb. xii. 14.

^o Rev. iii. 4.

He ordered him to be bound hand and foot, and cast into outer darkness ^p—

This fitly represents the vengeance that will be inflicted on all such intruders --

They may come in for a while and join themselves to the Lord's people—

But when the king himself shall see the guests, he will fix his eyes on them—

He will cast them out from the place they had so presumptuously occupied—

They shall never dwell in the mansions of light and glory above—

But take their portion in the regions of darkness and despair—

And there bewail for ever their irremediable delusions—]

Nor will their punishment in any respect exceed their guilt

[The intruder, in the parable, could make no reply to the king's address ^q—

He knew that he had rejected the offer of a wedding-garment—

And presumptuously supposed that his own was good enough for the occasion—

Thus he had poured contempt on the liberality and kindness of the king—

And was therefore compelled by his own conscience to acknowledge the justice of the sentence passed upon him—

Who then amongst *us* shall expect to imitate him with impunity?—

To *us* has our Lord repeatedly offered a wedding-garment—

Us has he often counselled to receive his robe of righteousness ^r—

We have been invited to go to him for the influences of his spirit ^s—

Shall we then expect admission into heaven if we reject his offers?—

Or

^p The room where the company was entertained being richly illuminated, the person cast out of it is said to be cast into *outer* darkness. How awfully applicable to those who shall be cast out of heaven!

^q He might have urged, That being brought suddenly out of the highways he had neither time to borrow, nor money to purchase, a wedding-garment. But this would have been to no purpose. Opulent persons had large wardrobes for the accommodation of all their guests. Lucullus at Rome was famed for having at least two hundred changes of raiment, or as Horace, by a poetical licence, says, five thousand. No doubt therefore a proper garment would have been lent him for the occasion, if he had chosen to accept it.

^r Rev. iii. 18.

^s John vii. 37—39.

Or shall we accuse him of severity if he cast us headlong into hell?—

Surely if we rest in any thing short of justification by his blood and renovation by his spirit, we shall be self-condemned for ever—]

IMPROVEMENT

1. For conviction

[As Christians we profess to have accepted the Saviour's invitation—

And to feast at his table here as an earnest of that richer feast above—

But have we indeed received Christ as our righteousness^t?—

Are we also renewed by his spirit in our inward man^u?—

We may easily deceive those who minister to us here below—

But "the king, who will come in to see the guests," can never be deceived—

However specious a garb we may have prepared for ourselves, he will easily distinguish it from that which he has given to his people—

Nor would he fail to discover the hypocrite, even if there were only one to be found in his whole church—

Surely then it becomes us to guard against self-deception—

We may *now* obtain from him a meetness to feast with his chosen—

But if we persist in our delusion, we shall find him inexorably severe—]

2. For consolation

[Some perhaps are troubled on account of their past presumption—

Especially, that they have unworthily communicated at the Lord's table—

Well indeed may such guilt fill them with compunction—

But, however presumptuously we have acted in past times, we have no reason to despond—

A wedding-garment is now offered to all who see their need of it—

Though we were of the poorest or vilest of mankind, it should not be withheld from us—

Nor, however many guests may come, will there be any deficiency of raiment for them all—

Let all then accept the free invitation of the gospel—

And thankfully put on the garment which the master of the feast has prepared for them—

Thus,

^t 2 Cor. v. 21. Jer. xxiii. 6.

^u 2 Cor. iv. 16.

Thus, though unworthy in themselves, they shall be accounted worthy through Christ—

And shall sit down for ever at the marriage feast in heaven—]

CCLXXIII. THE BUDDING FIG-TREE.

Luke xxi. 29—31. *And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig-tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves, that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see those things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.*

IT was no small advantage to our Lord's stated followers, that they could ask him more particularly respecting any thing which they did not perfectly understand—Of this privilege they often availed themselves, and obtained satisfactory information on many important points—Our Lord told them that the time was coming when that temple, which they so much admired, should be utterly destroyed—This was so contrary to their expectations, that they begged to know both the period to which he referred, and the particular signs whereby its approach might be ascertained—To this our Lord gave a very full reply; and illustrated his discourse by a parable taken from the season of the year, and most probably, from the prospect then before their eyes—This parable, with the application of it, shews us

I. That we ought to notice the signs which God has given us

There is scarcely any thing needful for us to know, which is not discoverable by certain signs even before it actually exists, or is fully accomplished—We may notice this

1. In the works of nature

[Our Lord justly observes that the seasons which succeed each other do not come upon us unawares, but manifest their approach by certain signs—The prophet describes the very birds of the air as instinctively observing their appointed times^a—And it is of the greatest importance to us in all our agricultural

^a Jer. viii. 7.

agricultural and commercial concerns to do the same—Indeed, if we should neglect such precautions, we should deprive ourselves in many instances of the comforts, if not the necessaries, of life—]

2. In the works of Providence

[Those great dispensations referred to in the text were, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the consequent enlargement of the Redeemer's kingdom—The time when they were to take place was to be known by impostors arrogating to themselves the Messiah's office; by bitter persecutions raised against the church, and lamentable apostasies occasioned by them; by destructive wars on earth, and tremendous signs in heaven; and particularly by the Roman standard being planted upon holy ground, when their armies should enclose and besiege Jerusalem—It was of infinite moment to the church to notice these signs; for, on their observation of them, under God, depended all their safety—And their attention to them enabled them to embrace the interval, when the siege was raised, to effect their escape; whereby *they* were preserved, while the whole nation besides were left to suffer the greatest extremities—

The signs of other times are not so clearly marked; and therefore cannot be so confidently interpreted: but it is wise to notice them with care; and our Lord warns us that our observations on the weather will turn to our condemnation, if we do not endeavour to improve with equal diligence our observations on the works of Providence^b—]

3. In the works of grace

[The conversion of the soul is preceded by many symptoms from which we may form a reasonable judgment—When we behold an humiliation for sin, a teachableness of mind, a love to ordinances, a diligence in duties, a renunciation of the world, and other similar marks, we may augur well respecting the event—And it is desirable to attend to these symptoms, because we may often derive from them a comfortable hope, when other circumstances might be ready to overwhelm us with despair—Our Lord himself formed his judgment upon these grounds; and we shall turn our observations to good account, if we follow his example^c—]

Though we are liable to mistake when we have not God for our guide, yet we are sure

II. That whatever God has signified to us in his word shall in due time be accomplished

The

^b Matt. xvi. 2, 3.

^c Mark xii. 34.

The destruction of the unbelieving Jews, and the redemption of the church from the midst of them, were emblematical of the judgments that would be executed, and the salvation that would be vouchsafed, in the last day—Indeed, the two periods are so interwoven in our Lord's discourse, that it is not easy to separate them—We may well therefore fix our attention on those events wherein we are all concerned ;

1. The final destruction of God's enemies

[This is foretold in unnumbered passages of scripture ; and the judgments, which are now executed in the world, are so many presages of a future retribution—Whatever people may imagine, this awful event shall come to pass—The Jews supposed that, because they professed the true religion, they should never experience the threatened calamities—But, when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, "wrath came upon them to the uttermost"—Thus it shall be with all the ungodly—In vain are all their hopes founded on their external relation to Christ ; the word of God will be fulfilled in its season ; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than one jot or tittle of it fail ^d—]

2. The eternal salvation of God's elect

[This is asserted with the same frequency and clearness as the opposite truth : and too often is it questioned by persons through the prevalence of unbelief—There may be indeed great, and, humanly speaking, insurmountable obstacles in the way—As the Christians were inclosed by the besieging army, yet escaped at last through the most unaccountable and impolitic conduct of the Roman general in intermitting the siege, so shall some way be found for the salvation of God's people : they may be hemmed in on every side ; yet shall not God's purposes of love be defeated, or the "smallest grain of pure wheat ever fall to the ground ^e"—]

This subject may be further IMPROVED

1. In a way of conviction

[It becomes us all to enquire what is to be expected from the signs that manifest themselves in us?—Is the fig-tree budding, and are the trees putting forth their leaves? or, are they stripped of their foliage, and assuming daily a more dead and barren appearance?—Are our graces, though small, growing in beauty and fruitfulness ; or are we mere cumberers of the ground, that bring forth no fruit to God?—From these things we may know the present and augur the future state,
of

^d Ver. 32, 33.

^e Amos ix. 9.

of our souls—O let our minds be open to conviction; and let conscience do its office—]

2. In a way of consolation

[We are “not to despise the day of small things”—Let us be thankful if there be “some good thing found in our hearts”—Summer comes not all at once; but, if the symptoms of it appear, we may wait with joyful expectation: and if the good work be begun in our hearts, we may be confident that God will carry it on and perfect it to the day of Christ[†]—]

[†] Phil. i. 6.

CCLXXIV. THE TEN VIRGINS.

Matt. xxv. 10. *And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut.*

TOWARDS the close of his ministry our Lord insisted much upon the vengeance which should in a little time be inflicted on the Jewish nation, and upon the general judgment which was to be typified by that event—He the rather dwelt on these subjects that he might keep up in the minds of his disciples an expectation of his future advent, and stimulate them to such incessant vigilance as might enable them to behold his face with joy—In the passage before us he compares his final appearance to the sudden return of a bridegroom; and the state of mankind to that of virgins who had been appointed to pay him the customary honours—He mentions two different descriptions of persons who had undertaken that office, and from whose character and end they might derive the most important instruction—We shall be profitably employed while we

I. Compare their character

There was much wherein the wise and foolish virgins appeared to resemble each other

[Both of them professed to be waiting the arrival of the heavenly bridegroom—Both, while the bridegroom tarried, became unwatchful, and were overpowered with sleep—Both were alarmed at the sudden tidings of his approach—And instantly

instantly began to put themselves in a state of readiness to meet him—This fitly describes the state of the visible church, in which, the professed intentions of all are exactly similar—All believe that Christ will come again to judge the world; and profess to be waiting for his arrival—All too are apt to be off their guard, and to yield to slothfulness—As for hypocrites, they are immersed in the deepest sleep; and even the best of men are sometimes remiss; yea, their utmost vigilance may be almost called a slumber, when compared with that activity and vigour of mind which they ought ever to preserve—The prospect of death and judgment is awful to persons of every description—Much as the bridegroom's arrival is desired, it is a solemn event to all—Nor can the holiest of men look forward to it but “with fear and trembling”—Often is his approach announced, when we, alas! are but little prepared for his reception—But all agree in preparing for him when he appears to be near at hand—Even hypocrites “in their affliction will cry, Arise and save us”—And all, except the most obdurate reprobates, will feel a desire to meet him with acceptance—]

But notwithstanding this resemblance between the wise and foolish virgins, they widely differed from each other

[The wise virgins had taken the precaution to secure oil in their vessels, that in case the bridegroom should tarry, they might have wherewith to replenish their lamps, and not be destitute of it in the hour of need—But the foolish virgins were contented with just so much as would enable them to make a fair show for the present; nor were they at all aware of the danger to which their improvidence exposed them—Hence when the cry was made at midnight the wise virgins had only to trim their lamps, which, though burning dimly, were yet lighted—But the foolish ones found their lamps extinguished; nor even knew how, or where, they should obtain a supply of oil—Instantly they requested the other virgins to impart to them of theirs; but were advised to go and procure it where alone it was to be obtained—The bridegroom however coming during their absence, the wisdom of the provident, and the folly of the improvident, were made apparent—

Now such is the difference that still exists between many professors of religion—Many have really the grace of God in their hearts—These have seen the danger of an unconverted state, and have received that unction of the Holy One, which they stood in need of—They know how strict the scrutiny will be in the last day, and have therefore prayed, that the Holy Ghost might be shed forth abundantly upon them through Christ Jesus—But others there are (would to God they were few!) who have taken up a profession lightly, and who are satisfied with having a form of godliness while they are destitute

destitute of its power—In an hour of alarm, they fly to the creature rather than to God—Even they who scoffed at religion in a time of health, will send for a minister, or some godly neighbour, in a prospect of death—But there they stop, and find to their cost the inefficacy of these means—Had they applied to Christ in due time, they might have “bought oil of him without money and without price”—But the bridegroom’s arrival finds them unprovided—And they are left to bewail the bitter consequences of their folly—]

There being no further room for comparison we shall now

II. Contrast their end

The wise virgins, who were ready, were admitted with the bridegroom into the marriage feast

[It was customary for the virgins, who came forth to attend the bridegroom, to participate the pleasures of the nuptial feast—This gives a just idea of their happiness who shall be found ready at the coming of their Lord—They shall enter into the chamber where all the guests are assembled—They shall hear the bridegroom’s voice, and enjoy the testimonies of his regard—The feast provided by God himself shall refresh their souls; while all the harmony of heaven shall fill them with exquisite delight—Then all painful watchings and anxious expectations for ever cease—No longer have they any corruptions to contend with, or any drowsiness to regret—Their fears are dissipated, their hopes are realized, and their most enlarged desires are swallowed up in actual fruition—]

The foolish virgins, who neglected their preparation, were for ever excluded

[No sooner was the bridegroom with his retinue entered into the house, than the door was shut—The door, which shut in the one, precluded all hope of admittance to the other—In vain did the foolish virgins come and cry for admission; all knowledge of them was disclaimed by the bridegroom, and they were left in “outer darkness”—Thus will it be to those who shall be called hence before they are prepared to meet their God—The door of heaven will be shut against them—The supplications, which a little before would have prevailed, will now be disregarded—They honoured not the Lord in their life; nor will he now honour or acknowledge them—They are cut off from all hope of joining that blest society, or of tasting the heavenly banquet—Nor will they merely suffer a privation of happiness—They will be consigned over to the punishment due to their offences, a punishment exquisite, irremediable, eternal—]

The IMPROVEMENT suggested by our Lord will properly close the subject

[The grand scope of the parable is, to shew us the need of watchfulness—And the chief argument to enforce that duty is, the uncertainty of the time when our Lord shall come—And is there any one, to whom we have not occasion to direct our exhortation?—Ye who, like the foolish virgins, have never yet obtained “the oil of joy and gladness,” watch against self-deception—You may make a specious profession of religion, and take occasion from the infirmities of true Christians to think yourselves in as good a state as they—But it will soon appear who they are that have the grace of God in their hearts; and who have only “a name to live while they really are dead”—Perhaps ye think that ye shall have time enough to provide oil when the bridegroom’s approach shall be announced—But ye know not whether ye shall have any warning, or whether ye shall be able to obtain it *then*, if ye neglect the present opportunity—Be assured that if the bridegroom come, he will not stay for you, but will enter with those who are ready, and leave the rest behind him—O think, what will ye do if the door should be shut against you? how will ye bewail your folly!—Be persuaded *now* to improve your time—Apply for oil to him who “has the residue of the spirit,” and will “give the Holy Spirit unto them that ask him”—Go not to the creature, no, not even to the ordinances, as though they *of themselves* could impart this blessing—Ministers and ordinances are, as it were, the pipes through which it shall be conveyed; but Christ, in his person and offices, is the one source of grace; and out of his fulness must ye all receive ^a—

As for you, who, like the wise virgins, are endued with grace, still continue to “watch”—You see from your own experience what need you have of this exhortation—Too often have you slumbered and slept already, and thereby exposed yourselves to many alarms—Henceforth “let your lamps be trimmed, your loins girt, and yourselves in actual readiness to attend your Lord”—Then, at whatever hour he shall come, ye shall have no cause to fear—Ye shall behold him with joy, and participate his glory for evermore—

‘What we say then to you, we say unto all, WATCH.’]

^a Zech. iv. 12—14.

CCLXXV. THE TALENTS.

Matt. xxv. 22, 23. *He also that had received two talents came, and said, Lord thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*

THE solemnities of the day of judgment were a frequent subject of our Lord's discourse—

This was a topic well calculated to fix the attention of his hearers—

The nearer he drew towards the close of his ministry, the more he insisted on it—

Nor can we too often dwell upon it in our minds—

The parable before us leads us to the contemplation of this awful subject—

It very nearly resembles the parable of *The Pounds*^a—

Yet are there some important points of difference between them^b—

These points will furnish occasion for two important observations

I. God bestows gifts on every man according to his own sovereign will

God is the source and author of every blessing we enjoy

[To him we owe it that we were brought into the world of Christian rather than of heathen parents—

From him we have received all our bodily and intellectual powers—

We possess nothing good, which we have not derived from him^c—]

He

^a Luke xix. 12—26. In both the parables a rich man going to a distant country committed a sum of money to his servants to improve for him, and on his return dealt with them according to the use they had made of it, rewarding the faithful and punishing the negligent.

^b In that of *the pounds* all the servants had an *equal sum* committed to them: but they made a *different improvement* of them, and were therefore *differently rewarded*. In the parable before us, the *sums* committed to the servants were *different*; but their *improvement* of them was *equal* (each having doubled his deposit) and therefore their *reward* was *equal* also.

^c James i. 17.

He dispenses extremely various gifts to various persons

[The greater part of the world are left by him in gross darkness—

To the Jews he vouchsafed the light of his revealed will—

The light that just dawned on them, has visited us in its meridian splendour—

But some in this Christian land are scarcely more instructed in the knowledge of Christ, than if they had no concern with him—

Others again have had their eyes opened to behold his glory—

Great was the diversity of gifts bestowed on the Christians of old^d—

And there is the same distinction made in the church at this day^e—

Hence we are called “stewards of the manifold grace of God^f”—]

These he bestows according to his own sovereign will

[The rich man in the parable gave to “each according to his several ability^g”—

Thus while he acted *sovereignly*, he acted also *wisely*--

And *in this point of view only* can that circumstance be applied—

It is not true that God bestows the richest talents on the most able men^h—

Besides, the very abilities we possess are derived from him alone—

And if man's ability were the measure of God's gifts, man would have room to boastⁱ—

God acts in all things according to his sovereign will^k—

Nevertheless his will is guided by consummate wisdom^l—

And every person, whatever his lot be, must confess with the apostle^m—

These considerations are indeed humiliating to our proud hearts—

But they are inexpressibly comforting to those whose talents are small, and whose afflictions are many—

Let such persons weigh them well, and make use of them for the suppressing of envy and discontentⁿ—]

We

^d 1 Cor. xii. 5—12.

^f 1 Pet. iv. 10.

^h 1 Cor. i. 26, 27.

^k Dan. iv. 35.

^m Eph. i. 8.

^g Eph. iv. 7.

^e Ver. 15.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iv. 7.

^l Eph. i. 11. “The

counsel of his will.”

ⁿ This is a little digression from the subject; or rather an application of it: but it is peculiarly proper in this place, in order to shew that the sovereignty of God is not a speculative point merely, but a practical,

We may well be satisfied with his conduct in this respect; for

II. He will reward every man, not so much according to the talents he possesses, as according to his fidelity in improving them

A man, endued with great gifts, will not be the more approved on that account

[The mere possession of great talents does not alter our moral character—

Judas was not at all inferior in knowledge to the other apostles—

Nor was he less endued with a power of working miracles than they—

All his opportunities of spiritual improvement were the same as theirs—

But his heart was not changed by means of these privileges—

Nor was his person the more accepted of God on account of them—

On the contrary, the greater his privileges, the greater was his guilt in neglecting to improve them—

And he now surpasses others in nothing but shame and misery^o—

To this purpose are those warnings which our Lord gave to the cities of Judea^p—

Nor are those warnings inapplicable to those who hear his gospel *now*—]

Nor will a person of the smallest talents be on that account overlooked

[“ God looks not at the outward appearance, but at the heart^q”—

He notices them that are of a broken and contrite spirit^r—

Few perhaps have been more destitute of gifts than Lazarus—

Yet how far better is his state now than the rich man's^s!—

The widow that possessed but two mites was destitute enough—

But the use she made of them was more acceptable to God than all the rich offerings of the opulent^t—

Thus, if we only improve what we have, we cannot fail of a reward—

On

practical, and most comforting doctrine. We are all placed, like the different members of the body, each in the fittest place: and were our situations altered otherwise than God has ordained, the change would be to the detriment both of the individual member, and of the whole body. See 1 Cor. xii. 11, 12, 18.

^o Acts i. 25.

^p Matt. xi. 21—24.

^q 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

^r Isai. lxvi. 2.

^s Luke xvi. 23, 24.

^t Mark xii. 43, 44.

On the contrary, if we bury our talent, though it be but "one," we shall be punished for it—]

The scriptures speak strongly upon each of these points

[They plainly declare that there are degrees of reward and punishment^u—

Our Lord assures us, that the punishment of men will be proportioned to the light against which they have sinned^x—

And St. Paul affirms, that our services shall be accepted in proportion as they corresponded with our ability to perform them^y—]

INFER

1. What little reason is there to envy those who have great talents!

[It is evident that an increase of talent only increases our responsibility—

To many, the advantages they have abused are now their greatest torment—

And what reason have we to think, that our diligence in serving God would be excited in proportion as our opportunities were enlarged?—

We all have too much reason to lament our past unprofitableness—

Let us therefore rather improve what we have, than covet what we have not—]

2. How earnest should every one be in trading with the talent committed to him!

[The time is shortly coming when we must give up our account to God—

And how awful will it be to be cast out as "wicked and slothful servants!"—

How will such characters weep and wail for the opportunities they have lost!—

On the contrary, how delightful to hear the Saviour's plaudit!—

What a recompence, to "enter into the joy of our Lord!"—

O let every soul exert itself to the utmost in his service—

Let none be discouraged because he can do but little for God—

Many who condemn themselves as vile and faithless, shall hear him say, Well done, good and faithful servants—

And many, who are ready to tremble with apprehensions of his wrath, shall be made partakers of his felicity and glory—]

3. How

^u 1 Cor. xv. 41, 42. 2 Pet. ii. 21.

^x Luke xii. 47, 48.

^y 2 Cor. viii. 12.

3. How little should we regard the attempts of the ungodly to repress our zeal!

[Men never condemn their own stewards for being too faithful or diligent—

Yet if any of the Lord's stewards labour to improve their talent, the world cry out against them as over-righteous—

But "it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment"—

Let the world exclaim against us as hypocrites or enthusiasts, if the Judge of all do but account us good and faithful—

His plaudit will abundantly compensate for the obloquy we endured—

Let us then, every one for himself, "stir up the gift of God that is in us"—

And let us exhort one another in the words of inspiration^z—]

^z 1 Cor. xv. 58.

THE MIRACLES.

CCLXXVI. THE ANALOGY BETWEEN BODILY AND SPIRITUAL CURES.

Luke vi. 19. *And the whole multitude sought to touch him : for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*

IN perusing the histories of ancient heroes, we may often be led to admire their skill and valour ; but we shall much oftener be shocked at the means they used to exalt and aggrandize themselves ; and, when we see them raising trophies to themselves on the ruins of slaughtered nations, we shall be induced to consider them as the plagues and scourges of mankind. But how different will be our sensations, when we read the history of Jesus ! There we shall meet with nothing which will not be delightful to a benevolent mind. If we trace him in his circuits through the country, and view in every place the objects that surround him, we shall behold at one time the eyes he has just now opened, gazing on him with wonder and amazement ; and at another time the ears he has unstopped, drinking in his words with insatiable eagerness and attention. *Here* we shall behold the hands he has restored to use, stretched forth to proclaim his praises ; and the feet he has strengthened, leaping and dancing round him with inexpressible delight : *there* we shall hear the tongues he has loosed, shouting with incessant acclamations ; and see those whom he has dispossessed of devils, sitting with composure at the feet of their benefactor. Sometimes we shall see the very dead starting forth into life and vigour at his command, and either rapturously saluting their disconsolate relations, or rending the air with their acclamations and hosannas. Such accounts as these, if considered only in a temporal view, cannot but excite in us a sympathetic joy, and afford the most pleasing sensations : but, no doubt, they were intended also to convey some spiritual instruction ; in which view they acquire an additional, and almost an infinite, importance.

importance. Perhaps it may be too much to say that the miracles, wrought by our Lord, were *types* of the spiritual blessings he conveys; but we may affirm without hesitation, that there is a very strong analogy between them: and therefore, when we see what he did to the bodies of men, we have, at least, a very just occasion of considering what he will do for our souls.

In this view we propose to consider the account given us in the chapter before us. We are informed that a great multitude came to him out of Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases: and then it is said, in the words of the text, "The whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."

To illustrate this subject we shall

I. Trace the analogy between the miracles wrought by our Lord on the bodies of men, and those which he yet works on men's souls

For the more distinct elucidation of this point, we may observe

1. There is a resemblance between the disorders of the body, and the disorders of the soul

[Many were brought to our Lord, who were blind, deaf, leprosy, and possessed with devils. And such are men at this time, in a spiritual view. Like the Laodiceans, however they may "think themselves rich and increased with goods, they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and *blind*; and therefore need to take counsel of our Lord, and to anoint their eyes with his eye-salve, that they may see^a." "Their eyes must be opened, before they will turn from the power of Satan unto God^b"]

The natural man too is represented as spiritually *deaf*; as having ears, and not hearing^c; as being unable to hear the voice of the good shepherd^d; yea, as like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear^e.

The *leprosy* also of sin lies deep in our hearts; as the prophet intimates, when, in allusion to the convicted leper, he says of himself, and of all around him, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips, and dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips^f."

Though

^a Rev. iii. 17, 18.

^c Matt. xiii. 15.

^e Ps. lviii. 4.

^b Acts xxvi. 18.

^d John viii. 47.

^f Isai. vi. 5.

Though dæmoniacal possessions were not properly disorders, yet are they always enumerated with them, when the miracles of our Lord are recited. And, however humiliating the truth may be, it is certain that we are all, while in an unconverted state, *possessed by Satan*. The unbelieving world are blinded^κ, governed^h, and led captive by him at his willⁱ. And, whatever evil they are excited to commit, it is through the instigation of that wicked fiend^k.]

2. There is a resemblance between the cures wrought by our Lord upon the bodies of men, and the cures which he will work upon their souls

[Wherever *the blessings of salvation are mentioned in the prophets*, they are set forth *in some highly figurative expressions*; and by none more commonly than by those *relating to bodily cures*. Isaiah says, “In that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind see out of obscurity and out of darkness^l.” And again, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped: then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing^m.” which figures are afterwards explained as relating to the *spiritual* salvation of the churchⁿ.

The application which the inspired apostles make of these prophecies further evinces the truth of our position. St. Matthew quotes a passage, which beyond all doubt relates to spiritual benefits that were to be obtained through the death of Christ, and explains it, *in a way of accommodation*, as referring to the bodily cures which our Lord had wrought^o. Further, *our Lord himself*, having healed a blind man, *takes occasion to trace this very analogy* between the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees, and the bodily blindness which he had just healed: “For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not might see, and that they who see might be made blind^p.” And both the answer which the Pharisees made to him, and the reply which our Lord gave them, manifest that this analogy was intended to be pointed out^q.]

3. There is a resemblance between the manner in which the diseased persons applied to our Lord for healing, and the manner in which we should apply to him for spiritual healing

[Of all the multitudes that came to our Lord, there was not one who was not *sensible of his disease*. Moreover, they all

^κ 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^h Eph. ii. 2.

^k John xiii. 27. Acts v. iii.

^l Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

^m Compare Isai. liii. 4, with Matthew viii. 16, 17.

ⁿ John ix. 39.

ⁱ 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^o Isai. xxix. 18. & xxxii. 3.

^p Ib. 10.

^q Ib. 40, 41.

all came to him with *deep humility*, prostrating themselves before him in the most abject manner^r, and acknowledging the utter insufficiency of all other means^s. And such was *their earnestness*, that they came from afar^t, and could not be prevailed upon to hold their peace^u, nor would take a denial even from our Lord himself^x. It is worthy of notice also, that they all came in faith: some few indeed doubted his power, and some his willingness, to help them: but none doubted both his power and his willingness; and the greater part entertained no doubt at all.

Thus then should we go to him, “weary and heavy-laden” with our sins, and so *sensible of our spiritual wants*, that, if he should ask us, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee? we may answer him immediately, “Lord, that this disorder may be healed, and that sin forgiven^y.” We must also, with all *lowliness of mind*, confess our inability to obtain relief from any other quarter, and our dependence on him alone^z. Moreover, in proof of our *earnestness*, we must not merely seek, but strive^a, determining to take the kingdom of heaven by violence^b, and not to let the Saviour go, except he bless us^c. Lastly, we must be sure to exercise *faith* in Christ, believing him both able and willing to save us: for we are expressly told that, he who wavereth and is of a doubtful mind, must not expect to receive any thing of the Lord^d.]

4. There is a resemblance between the manner in which our Lord cured their disorders and the manner in which he will cure ours

[He sometimes healed the people *secretly*, as when he took the deaf man aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and said, Ephphatha, be opened, and then charged him to tell no man^e. So he has now many “*hidden ones*,” in whose hearts he carries on a secret work, and heals them without attracting the notice of the world. At other times he performed the cures *openly*, and in the sight of all; as when he bade the man with the withered hand to stand forth^f. So he often converts the souls of profligate sinners, or bitter persecutors, in such a striking manner, as to fill all around them with wonder and amazement.

Sometimes he wrought his cures *instantaneously*; as in the man at the pool of Bethesda^h: and so he effects a sudden change in the hearts of many, causing them to cry out like the first converts, and the jailor, What shall I do to be saved?

^r Luke viii. 28, 41.

^u Matt. xx. 30, 31.

^z Hos. xiv. 1—3.

^c Gen. xxxii. 26.

^f Ps. lxxxiii. 3.

^s Mark v. 26, 33.

^x Matt. xv. 22—28.

^a Luke xiii. 24.

^d Jam. i. 6, 7.

^e Matt. iii. 3, 5.

^t Mark viii. 3.

^y Matt. xx. 33.

^b Matt. xi. 12.

^e Mark vii. 34, 36.

^h John v. 8.

savedⁱ? At other times he performed his cures *gradually*, as in the blind man, who at first saw men, as trees, walking^k: and so he often carries on his work in a gradual manner in our souls, leading us from progressive conviction to thorough conversion.

Sometimes he *used means* in curing them; as when he put clay and spittle on the blind man's eyes^l: so he now converts many by the preaching of his gospel. At other times he used *no means*, as in the case of the ten lepers, who were cleansed as they were going in the way^m: and so he often imparts the knowledge of himself by the teachings of his spirit, without using any particular means or instrument to convey it.

But however varied his manner was with respect to these things, in one respect it was uniformly the same: whomsoever he cured, he cured *perfectly*: and thus he always carries on the work he has begun in the souls of menⁿ, and perfects that which concerneth them^o.]

Since then, without any forced interpretations or conceits, we may draw such instruction from the miracles in general, let us endeavour to

II. Improve the particular miracle recorded in the text

If, in the concerns of our souls, we desire either direction or encouragement, we cannot find them any where more suitably afforded than in the passage before us; where the conduct of the multitude suggests the former, and the conduct of Jesus the latter. Let us then improve it

1. For direction

[We should not dare to exhort you in general to follow the multitude; since that would be to lead you in the broad road to destruction^p. But in the present instance we say, Follow *that* multitude.

Follow them *in the conviction which they had of their own need of Christ*. Every one felt within himself that he laboured under a disorder which needed healing; and, if each of them had been asked, What is your disorder? and what is yours? they could all have specified the principal symptoms of the disorders under which they laboured. Now thus must we go to Jesus, feeling and lamenting the ravages which sin has made upon our souls. It is not sufficient for us to confess in general that we are sinners; we must open our case to him, and tell him, "Thus and thus have I done^q." And, if the

ⁱ Acts ii. 37, & xvi. 30.

^l John ix. 6.

ⁿ Phil. i. 6.

^p Matt. vii. 13.

^k Mark viii. 24.

^m Luke xvii. 14.

^o Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^q Josh. vii. 20.

the Spirit of God have truly convinced us of sin, we shall find no more difficulty in this, than a poor man does in opening his complaints to a physician. More particularly, we should get our hearts impressed with the evil of our *besetting* sin; and, carrying it to Jesus, we should confess it, lament it, aggravate it, and implore both his mercy to pardon it, and his grace to subdue it: and, if we thus go to him labouring and heavy-laden, we have his promise that he will give us rest^r.

Follow them also *in their earnestness*. We are told that the people pressed on Jesus, so that they who were nearest to him could not maintain their place by reason of the multitudes, who strove to get access to him, and to touch him^s. They not only left their own business, but, in many instances, prevailed on their friends to relinquish their occupations also, in order to carry them to Jesus. In short, they postponed every consideration to that of obtaining a cure from him. And who could blame them? They found their need of healing, and knew that they might obtain it by going to him, and therefore they would on no account lose the opportunity afforded them: and, when they could in no other way get access to him, they would go up to the top of the house, and let down their diseased friends in a couch through the tiling^t. Would to God that we were all thus earnest for the salvation of our souls! that no consideration whatever were suffered to detain us from the Lord! and that not one of us might delay another hour to go unto him! We are far more favourably circumstanced than they were, since we can go to him without removing from our chamber, or intermitting our earthly business. He is every where present to heal us; if we can only break through the crowd of lusts and cares that are within our own hearts, there is no other crowd that can keep us from him. How anxious should we be to get immediate relief from an acute disorder, especially if there were but one physician able to heal us, and his continuance in our neighbourhood were likely to be very short! Let us then shew the same care for our souls, and go to Jesus without delay, knowing that "this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation."

Once more—Follow them *in their faith*. They were not only convinced of Christ's power and willingness to heal them, but were assured that, if they could but touch his garment, they should be whole^u. They did not stand reasoning about the matter, or go and try other means, but applied to him as their all-sufficient helper. So must we go to him, not endeavouring first to heal ourselves by our repentance, or labouring to make ourselves fit for him by our amendments, or questioning whether he be willing to receive us: we must go to him just

^r Matt. xi. 28.^s Mark iii. 10.^t Luke v. 19.^u Matt. ix. 21.

just as we are, altogether filthy and abominable; and be firmly persuaded that we shall not seek his face in vain. To be reasoning and yielding to doubts and fears will be of little avail; but to go to Christ in faith, will prove an infallible remedy for every ill: whatever be our complaint, he will say, "Go thy way; and, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee;" and we shall be made whole from that very hour^x.]

2. For encouragement

[We cannot conceive any thing more encouraging than the behaviour of our blessed Lord to the people.

Behold his *condescension*! How wonderful was it, that he, the Lord of glory, should suffer such a multitude of miserable and filthy objects to press upon him! yea, that he should go about through all cities, towns, and villages, for that very purpose! And will he now be inattentive to our spiritual wants? When we rush, as it were, with holy violence into his presence, and seek to touch him, will he forbid us? Will he withdraw himself from us, or say, "Stand off; thou art too vile to be admitted to my presence?" Has he not said, on the contrary, that whosoever cometh unto him, he will in no wise cast out^y? Let the trembling sinner then take courage; for his sighing shall soon be turned into that triumphant song, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless *his* holy name, who forgiveth all thy sins, and healeth all thy diseases^z."

Behold also his *compassion*! There was not one of all the multitudes that came to him, dismissed without a cure. Though many of them probably had despised him, and though he foresaw that many of those very persons would join in that general cry, Away with him, crucify him, crucify him, (as it is highly probable they did) yet his bowels of compassion yearned over them. Many, no doubt, were as unthankful as the nine lepers; yet did he not withhold his mercy from their bodies. How much more then will he have compassion on those who seek him for their souls! When he beholds them supplicating for the pardon of their sins, and the renovation of their hearts, will he turn from them, and shut his ear at their cry? no; he will rather fall upon their neck and kiss them^a; or, as the prophet speaks, "He will save; he will rejoice over them with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over them with singing^b." Only let us seek him in truth, and we shall find him rich in mercy unto all that call upon him^c.

Lastly, behold his *power*! However inveterate the diseases of many might be, the whole multitude were healed: and has he

^x Matt. viii. 13.

^z Ps. ciii. 1—3.

^b Zeph. iii. 17.

^y John vi. 3. 37.

^a Luke xv. 20.

^c Rom. x. 12.

he less power now that he is in heaven? Has he not "the residue of the Spirit," yea, and "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him?" Why then should any be discouraged? What though our sins be great? can he not forgive them? What though our habits be deeply rooted? can he not overcome them? What though our temptations be manifold? can he not deliver us out of all? Be our "enemies ever so mighty, he that dwelleth on high is mightier." Let us all surround him in expectation of his benefits; and "we shall find him able to save us to the uttermost."]

TO CONCLUDE

[Let us now picture to ourselves the state of the multitudes who had touched him: what joys! what raptures! what ecstasies! what congratulations from surrounding friends! what universal shouts and acclamations to the honour of Jesus! None ascribing their recovery to an arm of flesh; but all acknowledging Jesus as the sole author of their happiness! And why should it not be thus with us at this time? Surely, if this whole congregation would but vie with each other in their endeavours to obtain his blessing, they would soon have far more abundant cause for joy, than ever they had, whose bodily health was restored: for their souls should be freed from the deadly malady of sin, yea, "virtue should come forth from him to heal us all."]

CCLXXVII. OUR LORD'S TEMPTATION.

Matt. iv. 1. *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

THE agency of Satan cannot be doubted by any who really believe the scriptures—

His great employment from the beginning has been to seduce men to sin—

He succeeded, alas! too well in his attempts on our first parents in Paradise—

Hence he was emboldened to assault even the Son of God himself—

The account of this extraordinary conflict is introduced by the words before us—

We shall consider

I. The season of his assault

Our

Our Lord's Messiahship had just before been audibly attested by a voice from heaven

[This should seem, at first sight, to be a very unfavourable season—

One would think that the testimony so given should doubly fortify the mind of Jesus—

But Satan knows that exalted enjoyments are apt to put us off our guard—

We are but too ready to be puffed up with any distinguished favours—

And to grow secure when we appear to be established with grace^a—

Hence Satan is watchful to improve such opportunities against us—

He assaulted Paul as soon as he had descended from the third heavens^b—

And vanquished Peter immediately after the highest honour had been conferred upon him^c—

Such are the seasons too when, with most violence, he assaults us—

In them therefore we should stand more particularly on our guard—]

But, to counterbalance that, he had been left a long time without food—

[He had been led into the wilderness immediately “by the Spirit” of God—

Yet no supply of food had been given him for the space of “forty days”—

This seemed to indicate that his heavenly Father had forgotten him—

Satan took advantage of this circumstance to assault him more fiercely—

Thus he makes his attacks on us in a season of spiritual desertion—

If in a time of unusual light and joy he sees us vulnerable, much more does he in an hour of darkness and distress—

As he prevailed against Eve in the absence of her husband, so he assails us with more effect in the absence of our God—

We should be aware therefore of his devices, and arm ourselves more particularly in the times and seasons of his approach—]

Satan, seizing his opportunity, exerted all his power and cunning to tempt him

II. The

^a Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

^b 2 Cor. xii. 2, 4, 7.

^c Matt. xvi. 17, 18, 19, 22, 23.

II. The particular temptations with which he assaulted him

Luke intimates that during the whole forty days Satan continued his attack—

But there are three temptations specified, as being the last, and most violent

1. To distrust

[Jesus, as man, was entirely dependent on his heavenly Father—

And was therefore bound to wait till the Father should send him relief—

As Moses and Elias had done before, he had already fasted forty days—

Being oppressed with hunger, Satan urged him to “turn the stones into bread”—

And to demonstrate his Messiahship by providing this supply for himself—

But such an act would have argued a distrust of God's providence—

Our Lord therefore repelled the temptation with the shield of faith—

And shewed from scripture, the folly of complying with that request of Satan ^d—]

2. To presumption

[Satan always endeavours to drive men to extremes—

He took our Lord (doubtless by his own consent, and as one man would take another) to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple—

He then urged him, in proof of his Messiahship, to cast himself down—

And, in support of his request, urged a promise expressly made to the Messiah ^e—

But, in quoting the passage, he omits a very essential part ^f—

God will support, not Jesus only, but all his children, *in the way of duty*—

This however does not warrant any to rush needlessly into danger—

Such an act as Satan recommended would have been presumptuous—

Our Lord therefore rejected the proposal with abhorrence—

And justified his refusal by a more apposite portion of holy scripture ^g—]

3. To

^d Ver. 4. with Deut. viii. 3.

^e Ver. 6. with Ps. xci. 11, 12.

^f The promise is restricted; “*In all thy ways;*” that is, in all the ways where duty calls us; but not in all the ways to which presumption might carry us.

^g Ver. 7. with Deut. vi. 16.

3. To ambition

[What he could not do by deceit, Satan now endeavoured to effect by the greatness of his offers—

Having taken Jesus to an high mountain, he “shewed him all the glory of the world”—

And promised to give it all to *him*, if he would only pay him one single act of adoration—

Alas! how many have been allured to sin by this bait!—

How many for a little honour or profit have obeyed Satan rather than God!—

The proposal, however, excited in our Lord an holy indignation—

He instantly spurned the tempter from him with majestic authority^h—

Yet even here, as on both the former occasions, he quoted scripture in support of his conductⁱ—]

Such temptations, however strong, were not able to overcome Jesus

III. The issue of them

Satan, foiled in every onset, was obliged to leave the field

[He could not withstand the authoritative command of Jesus—

Abashed and confounded, he, for the present, desisted from his enterprise—

But he “departed *only* for a season,” determined to repeat his assaults, whenever occasion should offer^k—

Thus it is that he retreats from *us*, when he has been vanquished by us—

He never relinquishes for a moment his purpose to destroy us^l—

He only waits for some more favourable opportunity to renew the combat—

But if, like Jesus, we resist him manfully, he shall flee from us^m—

And in due season shall be altogether bruised under our feetⁿ—]

That evil spirit being vanquished, other spirits came to succour our victorious Lord

[Angels were sent from heaven to minister to his necessities^o—

And

^h Ver. 10.

ⁱ Deut. x. 20.

^k Luke iv. 13. Accordingly we find him assaulting our Lord again, John xiv. 30. Luke xxii. 53.

^l 1 Pet. v. 8.

^m James iv. 7.

ⁿ Rom. xvi. 20.

^o Ver. 11.

And what delight must they feel in executing the task assigned them !—

Doubtless they would congratulate him on the victory he had gained—

And Jesus, recruited by their means, would enter on his labours with redoubled vigour—

To us also shall those benevolent spirits be sent to minister ^p—

They shall encamp around us in the hour of danger ^q—

They shall shield our heads, and strengthen our arms, in the day of battle ^r—

And when exhausted with conflicts, we shall receive consolation and encouragement from their hands ^s—]

INFER

1. There is no man, however great or holy, who is not exposed to the assaults of Satan

[If the Son of God himself was not exempt, who can expect to be so ?—

The more holy we are, the more inveterate will Satan be against us—

In the season we least expect his temptations, they may be most violent—

In a season of difficulty we may be soon led to entertain hard thoughts of God—

From past deliverances we may be emboldened to indulge an unwarrantable confidence—

Yea, like Demas, we may turn back, through love of this present world—

Let us not then be secure as though our conflicts were ended ^t—

As long as we are in the body, we must watch and pray ^u—]

2. The way of resisting Satan with effect, is plain and obvious

[Our Lord repelled every temptation with the word of God—

That word is a sword of divine temper, which Satan cannot withstand ^x—

It may be wielded by every one who truly relies upon it—

Let us not, however, wrest it to the countenancing of presumption—

Let us rather labour to understand its true import—

Then our dependence on it cannot be too firm—

Christ,

^p Heb. i. 14.

^q Ps. xxxiv. 7.

^r Acts xii. 15. Ps. xci. 4, 5, 11.

^s Compare Gen. xvi. 7—10. with Luke xvi. 22.

^t Rom. xi. 20.

^u Matt. xxvi. 41.

^x Eph. vi. 17.

Christ, by his own temptations, has learned to succour us^y—

He has assured us also that we shall not be tempted beyond our strength—

In his grace let us be strong and courageous—

And, having fought like him, we shall shortly triumph with him^z—]

^y Heb. ii. 18.

^z 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

CCLXXVIII. THE WATER TURNED INTO WINE.

John ii. 11. *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory: and his disciples believed on him.*

SMALL occurrences often appear important when we love the persons concerned in them—

In this view the most trifling actions of our Lord demand our regard—

But his miracles are worthy of our deepest attention—

He wrought them in confirmation of the doctrines he taught—

And appealed to them as satisfactory evidences of his divine mission—

That referred to in the text will afford much instruction, if we consider

I. The circumstances

Our Lord was invited to the marriage-feast of a relation or friend—

To honour the institution of marriage he accepted the invitation^a—

There an *occasion* offered for working a stupendous miracle

[Probably the bridegroom was not very opulent—

And Jesus' presence might bring many unexpected guests—

Before the conclusion of the feast the store of wine was consumed—

The

^a By this we may see how vain and impious are those restraints which popery imposes upon the ministers in her communion, under the idea that the sanctity of their office forbids them from entering into the marriage state.

The virgin-mother intimated this to her son in hopes that he would work a miracle on their behalf—

And he, mildly checking her interference, complied with her request^b—]

The *manner* in which he performed it is worthy of notice

[The Jews used much water for ceremonial washings—

Our Lord ordered all the water-pots to be filled with water^c—

And without any visible interposition changed the water to wine—

Thus he avoided all appearance of ostentation or collusion—

He made the servants vouchers for the truth of the miracle—

And not only supplied the wants of the company, but rewarded the generosity of the bridegroom^d—]

It soon attracted general attention

[The governor of the feast immediately distinguished its superior excellence—

And complimented the bridegroom on its delicious flavour^e—

This brought to light the miracle that had been wrought—

Nor could a doubt of its reality be left on the minds of any—]

Without seeking an improvement of this miracle in any fanciful exposition of its particular circumstances, we shall rather notice, in its general effect

II. The

^b *Γύραι*, Woman, was as respectful a term as any he could use: persons of the highest distinction were so addressed. But his address was certainly a reproof to his mother for interfering with him in the discharge of his office. Nevertheless he intimated his intention of complying presently with her request: and it is evident from her charge to the servants that she understood him so. But how absurd to pray to the virgin to *command* her son *now*, when she was rebuked for *counselling* him *in the days of his flesh!*

^c This order was punctually executed; “they filled them up to the brim;” so that there was no room for deception by mixing wine with the water.

^d The quantity must be very large, but the exact measure cannot be ascertained: if, as is probable, the feast lasted seven days, the wine thus miraculously supplied, might be intended for their use on the remaining days.

^e His expression “well drunk” does not apply to the guests then present: but if it did, it by no means implies excess: the word *μεθυσεν* being often used where the most perfect sobriety was observed. See Gen. xliii. 34. in the LXX.

II. The importance of it

This was the first public miracle that Jesus wrought^f—
And it was attended with the happiest effects

1. It displayed the Saviour's glory

[Jesus as the Messiah was to confirm his word by miracles—

In the work he now performed he shewed his almighty power—

Nothing could be impossible to him who could "make the water wine"—

He shewed by this that he could supply our every want—

And that he would prove himself an all-sufficient Saviour—

He manifested also his transcendent goodness—

The wine, though proper for the occasion, was not absolutely necessary—

Yet Jesus exerted his almighty power to provide them with it—

Thus he shewed that nothing was too great for him to bestow—

And that his followers might rely on him for whatever could conduce to their present and eternal comfort—]

2. It confirmed the faith of his disciples

[The disciples believed in Jesus the first moment he called them—

But their faith was as yet but weak and wavering—

Now, however, their eyes were more fully opened—

They could not doubt the divine authority of him who wrought such works—

Nor could they regret that they had forsaken all to follow him—

It is thus that our faith also is strengthened and confirmed—

Nothing but experience will fully teach us—

But every fresh discovery of Christ's power and grace unites us to him—

And encourages us to trust in him with more implicit confidence—]

OBSERVATIONS

1. It is our duty to enjoy the company of Jesus in our social meetings

[Religion is far from encouraging a morose seclusion from society—

Or from prohibiting occasional festivities, provided they be regulated by prudence and sobriety—

But they should be made the occasions of spiritual improvement—

Jesus

^f St. John again notices it in a subsequent part of his gospel, iv. 46.

Jesus himself, if duly invited, would be present at them ^g—

Let us then endeavour to obtain his presence with us—

This will our social intercourses be kept from levity or excess—

And be rendered subservient to the welfare of our souls—]

2. Wherever Jesus comes he will contribute much to our happiness

[No doubt his conversation was edifying and instructive—

And the want, occasioned by his presence, was richly supplied—

What a season of holy joy must that company have experienced!—

Thus, he never fails to instruct and comfort those who seek him—

He turns our most common blessings into the richest dainties—

The very bread we eat, or air we breathe, are made doubly sweet—

The more we know of him, the more delight shall we find in him—

The comforts which the world gives, though sweet at first, are at last embittered—

But Jesus always gives us the best wine last—

How true shall we find this when we sit down at his marriage supper ^h!—

Let us then seek communion with him as our chief joy—]

3. If we leave our concerns to Jesus, he will surely glorify himself at last

[We are too apt to dictate to him as to the time and mode of our relief—

But such presumption will ever meet with a rebuke—

He both knows all our wants, and the fittest time to supply them—

He will regulate his dispensations towards us with consummate wisdom—

And order every event for his own glory, and our greatest good—

Let us then commit our every concern to him—

And our very straits shall redound to his honour and our eternal happiness—]

^g Matt. xviii. 20.

^h Rev. xix. 9.

CCLXXIX. THE DRIVING OF THE BUYERS AND
SELLERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE.

John ii. 17. *And his disciples remembered that it was written,
The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

WE are apt to think that we receive no benefit from what we read or hear, unless it produce an immediate effect upon us—

But the word, like the seed, often springs up long after it has been sown—

God often brings it to our minds by some great and singular occurrence—

And then we see a beauty and importance in it which we never saw before—

The apostles themselves forgot many things which were spoken to them by our Lord, till the Holy Spirit brought them to their remembrance—

They had often heard the Psalms read in their synagogues—

But probably never reflected on the passage before us, till our Lord's conduct suggested it to their minds, and reflected the true light upon it—

We shall consider

I. The circumstances which brought these words to their remembrance

Our Lord, for the first time after his entrance on his public character, went up to Jerusalem at the pass-over—

There he found that the temple of God was scandalously profaned—

And he immediately set himself to rectify the abuses that were there tolerated

[The outer court of the temple was appropriated to the use of the Gentiles—

But many of the Jews had rendered it a place of merchandise—

There they exposed for sale the cattle that were proper to be offered in sacrifice—

And stationed themselves with tables of money for the accommodation

accommodation of the strangers who might want to exchange their foreign coin—

Thus they insulted the Gentiles and greatly dishonoured God—

To correct this evil, our Lord exerted his divine authority—

He drove out the cattle, and ordered the doves to be removed—

He overturned the tables of money, and commanded all the traders to depart—

Nor did any of the people dare to oppose his sovereign command—]

This act of his could not fail of attracting universal notice—

It discovered

1. His holy indignation against sin

[Such a profanation of the temple was indeed a grievous sin—

Nor could his righteous soul behold it without the utmost abhorrence—

His anger was justly excited by the indignity offered to his Father—

To have felt it less, would have been a crime; and to have refrained from manifesting it, a mark of cowardice—

We indeed are not called to manifest our displeasure in the same authoritative way—

But we should never behold sin but with pain and grief—

Nor can our indignation be ever sinful, provided it be directed against sin as its object, and be felt only in proportion to the malignity of the offence committed—

We can never err, if we follow the example of those eminent saints^b—]

2. His courageous zeal for God

[The priests themselves were accessory to the dishonour done to God—

If they did not encourage it for gain, they at least promoted it by connivance—

Thus they, no less than the traders, were interested in maintaining the abuse—

And, no doubt, would be forward to uphold it with all their power—

But Jesus feared not the face of men, though all should combine against him—

He

^a Every one had occasion for an half shekel for the service of the temple, Exod. xxx. 13—16.

^b Ps. cxix. 53, 136, 158. Jer. ix. 1.

He resolutely determined to suppress these gross abominations—

And, without any regard to consequences, set himself to perform his duty—

Thus should we move undaunted in the way of duty—

Nor ever be deterred from it by the dictates of carnal policy^c—]

3. A miraculous power over the minds of men

[What but this could prevent their rising against him?—

He detected their hypocrisy, removed their impiety, mortified their pride, opposed their interests, and loaded them with disgrace—

He did this singly, unarmed, unsupported, and in opposition to the existing authorities—

Yet, behold, they were all constrained to yield submission to his will—

We cannot doubt but that he miraculously overawed their minds—

Nor was this a less exertion of omnipotence than any other of the miracles which he wrought—]

The sight of these things particularly affected his immediate followers— •

And brought to their recollection a portion of scripture which they had never before noticed

II. The words themselves

The words were justly quoted in reference to Christ

[In their primary sense indeed they had their accomplishment in David—

David elsewhere expresses in very strong terms his zeal for God^d—

Nor can we forget how he manifested it when he danced before the ark^e—

But David in Ps. lxxix. confessedly personates the Messiah—

Some parts are applicable to himself, and some to Christ, alone^f—

The words before us may very properly be applied to both—

Indeed the strength of the terms would almost lead us to confine them to Christ—

His holy soul was inflamed with incessant zeal for God's honour—

Nor

^c Jer. i. 17.

^d Ps. ci. 3—8.

^e 2 Sam. vi. 14.

^f Ver. 5. cannot well be applied to any but David; nor can ver. 21. to any but Christ. It is thus that the literal and prophetic parts of scripture are continually intermixed.

Nor did he ever suffer one opportunity of promoting his glory to pass unimproved—

The occasion now before us called forth the strongest exertions of his zeal—

And manifested the full accomplishment of this prophecy in his person—]

They are also replete with useful instruction to us—

They reprove the shameful want of zeal amongst his followers

[God is greatly dishonoured by men on every side—

His name is blasphemed, his word despised, his authority rejected—

Does it become his people to behold these things with indifference?—

Should they not resemble Paul when he beheld the idolaters at Athens^e?—

Should they not imitate John^h, and adopt the words of Jeremiahⁱ?—

Should they not reprove sin in others as well as abstain from it themselves^k?—

But how miserably defective are even good people in this particular!—

How often do fear or shame restrain them from bearing their testimony for God!—

Alas! what a sad contrast does our conduct form with that of our Lord!—

Have we not reason then to be ashamed, and mourn for our neglect?—

But many, so far from rebuking sin in others, indulge it in themselves—

Even in the very house of God they harbour worldly and carnal thoughts—

Nor are at all concerned to have their hearts purified from vile affections—

Surely this cannot but be most offensive to the heart-searching God—

Let us remember the solemn caution given us by the apostle^l—

With respect to others, let us never presume to use the petulant language of Cain^m—

But rather endeavour to obey the injunction which God has given usⁿ—

And, *with respect to ourselves*, let us seek in all things that conformity to Christ which is required of us^o—

They

^e Acts xvii. 16.

ⁱ Jer. xiii. 17.

^l 1 Cor. iii. 17.

ⁿ Lev. xix. 17.

^h Mark vi. 18.

^k Eph. v. 11.

^m Gen. iv. 9.

^o 1 John ii. 6.

They afford us a proper example for our imitation

[Phinehas of old *was* called to execute the judgment he inflicted on Zimri ^p—

Thus Jesus, as the prophet of the Most High, was called to vindicate God's honour—

In the same manner we should do whatever our place and station require—

We must not all take on ourselves the office of magistrates—

Or assume the authority which does not belong to our situation and circumstances—

Our zeal must be regulated by the word of God—

It must be *in a good cause*; and in support of truth and virtue ^q—

It must be *pure*; and free from bigotry, ostentation, or wrath ^r—

It must be *discreet*, not precipitating us into unbecoming conduct ^s—

It must be *proportioned*, in a measure, *to the occasion* that excites it—

And it must be *uniform*, opposing sin in ourselves as much as in others ^t—

Such a zeal as this cannot be too vigorously maintained ^u—

An intemperate zeal will injure the cause it attempts to serve—

But that which is duly tempered with meekness and wisdom will be productive of much good ^x—

Let us then check the unhallowed zeal that would call fire from heaven ^y—

And cherish that which is meek, humble, pious and benevolent ^z—

Thus shall we approve ourselves to be God's peculiar people ^a—

And, while we please our God, shall be a blessing to all around us—]

^p He was a ruler himself, and acted by the command of the chief magistrate. Compare 1 Chron. ix. 20. Numb. xxv. 5, 7, 8.

^q Rom. x. 2.

^r 2 Kings x. 16.

^s Jude 22, 23.

^t Rev. iii. 19.

^u Rom. xii. 11.

^x Gal. iv. 18.

^y Luke ix. 54.

^z Jam. iii. 17.

^a Tit. ii. 14.

[CCLXXX. THE NOBLEMAN'S SON CURED.

John iv. 49—51. *The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down, ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had*

had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.

IF the rebukes of God be in one view tokens of his displeasure, they certainly in another view are expressions of his regard, and have frequently been forerunners of peculiar mercy—The Canaanitish woman was frowned upon, as it were, by our Lord, as utterly unworthy to taste the children's bread; yet was immediately afterwards admitted to a participation of it—Thus the nobleman, who now addressed him, received a reprimand for his backwardness to believe; but was nevertheless favoured instantly with an answer suited to his wish—

The circumstances related in the text lead us to observe

I. That weak and strong faith differ widely in their effects

This is particularly discoverable in the history before us

[The nobleman's faith, though weak, induced him to take a considerable journey that he might find Jesus, and brought him to apply to Jesus with much humility and respect—Yet he could not refrain from limiting the power of Jesus, and prescribing to him the time and manner in which his request should be granted—And because his petition was not granted at first, he grew impatient, and intimated his apprehensions, that, if the relief were not instantly afforded, it would soon be too late even for Jesus himself to interfere—But when his faith was strengthened by the word and spirit of Christ, the tumult in his mind subsided, the irritation yielded to composure, and his apprehensions were banished by a firm expectation that the promised blessing should be given—Though he saw no change with his eyes, yet he doubted not but that a change had taken place; and he left it to Jesus to accomplish his own word in his own way—]

Such are the various effects produced in us also by a similar cause

[The weakest faith, if truly sincere, will bring us to Jesus with reverence and humility—And will make us urgent with him to bestow upon us his benefits—Nor shall we regard any trouble in seeking him, provided we at last obtain the desired blessings—But if our “hope be deferred, it will make our heart sick”—We shall become impatient, if the pardon which we seek be not instantly sealed upon our consciences, or the victory we solicit be suspended for a while in dubious conflict—

conflict—We shall be ready to dictate to Jesus both the time and manner of his interference, and to limit his powers according to our own narrow apprehensions of them—When our faith is strengthened, we shall rest more simply on his declarations and promises—We shall not like Zacharias, want a sign to confirm them, or, like Rebekah, use sinful means of hastening their accomplishment^a—We shall be willing to let him work in his own way—Though we see not his word yet accomplished, nor know in what way it shall be fulfilled, yet we shall be satisfied, and content to wait till he shall clear up to us what is dark and intricate^b—Our expectation will be patient, and our confidence in him assured—Like Abraham, we shall not stagger at his promises, but give him the glory of his faithfulness and omnipotence^c—]

Nor does God fail to distinguish these different degrees of faith by different tokens of his approbation—This will appear while we observe

II. The more we exercise faith, the more evidence of its efficacy and acceptance will God vouchsafe unto us

The experience of the nobleman well illustrates this truth

[His faith while it was yet weak, prevailed for the obtaining of the mercy he desired—Jesus kindly overlooked his impatience, and granted him even more than he had asked—This was a rich reward of faith—But when the nobleman returned home in full expectation of finding every thing true which Jesus had declared, his faith received a yet stronger confirmation from the account which the servants gave him—And the more minutely he enquired into the circumstances of his son's recovery, the more fully was he convinced that it had been effected by the invisible agency of the Lord Jesus—By this was his faith yet more abundantly confirmed, insomuch that both he and all his family became disciples of Jesus^d—]

The same may be traced in the experience of all believers

[The smallest degree of true faith will surely bring them the pardon of their sins, and whatever is absolutely needful for their salvation—"If their faith be only as a grain of mustard-seed, it shall remove mountains"—But, if they be strong in faith, they shall see the glory of God in a far more conspicuous manner^e—They may not indeed immediately see God, as it were, in the act of working; but they shall see frequent

reason

^a Luke i. 18. Compare Gen. xxv. 23. and xxvii. 8—10.

^b Isai. xxviii. 16.

^c Rom. iv. 20.

^d Ver. 52, 53.

^e John xi. 40.

reason to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"—When they come to compare events with the promises of God, they will be constrained to acknowledge and adore his good providence—They will see how indebted they have been to his gracious interposition for many deliverances from danger, supports in trouble, and victories in their spiritual warfare—They may indeed, like Joshua himself, be so stumbled for a moment by some dark dispensation, that they shall almost doubt whether they have not been under a delusion^f—But like him, they shall be enabled to look back for a series of years, to recount the mercies of the Lord, and to bear testimony to his unalterable truth and faithfulness^g—Upon a review of their lives, they shall have as clear evidences of a divine interposition in their favour, as if they had seen a miracle wrought before their eyes—Nor shall they hesitate to declare with the holy apostle, "He that hath wrought us to the self-same thing is God^h"—]

To IMPROVE this subject, we would suggest some suitable advice

1. Let all personal or domestic troubles lead us to Jesus

["We are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward"—None are exempt from it in this vale of tears—The nobleman is as much exposed to it as the beggar—But God sends it for good—He sends us adversity that we may be led to consideration—And many have found cause to bless him for their troubles—Many must say, "Before I was afflicted I went astray;" "It is good for me that I have been afflicted"—"Hear then the rod, and him that hath appointed it"—Its voice to us is, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found;" "turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die"—Improve afflictions thus, and you will be thankful for them to all eternity—What a mercy in the issue did the sickness of the nobleman's son prove both to the nobleman and all his family!—And most assuredly, if your troubles should prove the means of bringing you to an acquaintance with Jesus, and an experience of his grace, you will never regret the means by which the mercy was conferred upon you—]

2. Let us never prescribe to Jesus, or limit the power of his grace

[The Lord knows best how to deal with his people—He went to the Centurion's house because *he* was both humble and believing; but refused to go to the nobleman's, that he might more effectually correct *his* pride and unbelief—Thus he may pursue various methods with us—But he will act in all things with consummate wisdom—He will "abound towards us in all

^f Josh. vii. 6—9.

^g Josh. xxiii. 14.

^h 2 Cor. v. 5.

all wisdom and prudence"—Let us then commit ourselves to him, saying. *When* thou wilt, and *what* thou wilt, and *as* thou wilt—In this way we shall have our minds composed, and our thoughts established—And though he may lead us, as he did the Israelites, by a very tedious and circuitous path, yet we shall find at last that it was the "right way"ⁱ—]

3. Let every fresh discovery of his mercy make us more solicitous to bring others to him

[The nobleman doubtless related to his family all that Jesus had spoken to him; and was instrumental in bringing all his family to believe in him—And shall not *we* make this improvement of his mercies vouchsafed to *us*?—Shall we not exhort those, over whom we have influence, to trust in his word?—Surely if we express a concern for their bodily welfare, we should be no less solicitous for the salvation of their souls—And if we have found the benefit of believing in him ourselves, we should labour that all around us may be partakers of that benefit—By telling of his goodness we shall pay him that tribute which he expects at our hands, and anticipate that employment in which we hope to be occupied to all eternity—]

ⁱ Ps. cvii. 7.

CCLXXXI. CHRIST ESCAPES FROM HIS BLOOD-THIRSTY PERSECUTORS.

Luke iv. 28—30. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill (whereon their city was built) that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them, went his way.*

NOTHING is more uncertain or transient than popular applause. However just may be the grounds of any praise that is bestowed, the smallest circumstance is sufficient to obliterate all remembrance of a person's merits, and to render him an object of general indignation. At the close of his life our Lord experienced this in a most astonishing degree. for the very people, who but three days before had followed him with acclamations and hosannas, were instigated by their rulers to cry out with
equal

equal fervour, Crucify him, crucify him. Scarcely inferior to this was the instance that occurred to him the very first time he preached at Názareth. When his sermon was but half finished, his auditors were filled with admiration at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth : but before the close of it, they rose up in murderous rage in order to destroy him.

We shall consider

I. The occasion of their wrath

Our blessed Lord had preached to them in a kind but faithful manner

[He had opened to them a passage from the prophet Isaiah, and informed them, that it was accomplished in him. This on the whole afforded general satisfaction : but yet he saw that there were some objections lurking in their minds, relative to his parentage and education ; and that they were displeased because he had not given a preference to his own townsmen, and wrought his miracles there rather than at other places. These objections he anticipated, and proceeded to return an answer to them. He observed, *first*, that prophets in general were not received in the place where they had been educated, because the people who had known them as equals or inferiors, did not like to submit to them in their prophetic character. *Secondly*, he shewed them from different instances in the scriptures, that God had always dispensed his favours in a sovereign manner, and had sometimes imparted them to the despised Gentiles in preference to his own peculiar people.

This was the immediate purport of what he *spoke* ; but doubtless there was much more *insinuated*, than what was plainly expressed. His answer was intended to bring conviction upon their minds, and to shew them, that they were indulging prejudices against him in spite of all they had heard respecting him ; and that, if they yielded to their unbelief, they would constrain him to withhold his blessings from them, and even to send them to the Gentile world in preference to them.]

This was the true ground of all their rage

[They saw the drift of his discourse : but they hated the light ; and therefore sought immediately to extinguish it. They were not disposed to contend with him in a way of argument ; for they saw that the truth was against them. They resorted therefore to clamour and persecution, the usual substitutes for truth and reason. But to reject him merely, was not sufficient : nor could they be contented even with expelling him from the city : no ; nothing but his blood would

satisfy them; and therefore, forgetting the sanctity both of the synagogue and of the sabbath, they rose up with one consent, and thrust him out of the city to an eminence, that they might dispatch him in a moment. Probably in executing thus, what they would have called, the judgment of zeal^a, they thought they were doing an acceptable service to their God; so blinded were they by their own passions, and “captivated by the devil at his will.”]

The inspired historian has declared to us

II. The manner in which our Lord escaped its effects

Our blessed Lord on different occasions withdrew himself from those who loved, and from those who hated him^b. His escape from them at this time may be considered.

1. As it respected *them*

[His withdrawal from them was *miraculous*, as much as if he had beaten them all down with his word^c, or smitten them with blindness^d, or struck them dead upon the spot^e. The precise mode of his withdrawal is not specified; but it seems that he rendered himself invisible, and thus escaped from their hands.

It was also *merciful*, both as it tended to convince them of his miraculous power, and especially as it prevented them from executing their murderous purposes. What a mercy did David esteem it, when by the interposition of Abigail he was kept from destroying Nabal^f! Much more, if they ever received grace to repent of their wickedness, was it a mercy to those infatuated zealots, that they had not been suffered to imbrue their hands in the blood of God’s only Son.

But it was also *judicial*: for, by means of his departure, the people of Nazareth were deprived of many temporal benefits, which, if they had received him more worthily, he would have imparted to them: they were deprived also of his spiritual instructions, which, if duly improved, would have converted and saved their souls.]

2. As it respects *us*

[In this escape of his we see, *what care he will take of us*, and *what care we ought to take of ourselves*.

Every faithful servant of God must expect persecution. But he is immortal till his work is done. God will screen him from his enemies, how numerous, potent, or inveterate soever they may be^g. Look at Paul when a conspiracy was formed against

^a Numb. xxv. 7—13.

^c John xviii. 6.

^e 2 Kings i. 10, 12.

^g Zech. ii. 5. Isai. xxxiii. 21, 22.

^b Luke xxiv. 31 John viii. 59.

^d Gen. xix. 11. 2 Kings vi. 18.

^f 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33.

2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

against his life; and at Peter when chained in an inner prison in order to be brought forth the next day for execution: how seasonably, and in what an unlooked for manner, did God interpose for their deliverance^b! Thus will he exert his almighty power on behalf of all who serve him faithfully, unless indeed the hour is come for them to receive their full reward. We never need to fear the face of man: for God has "put a hook in the nose, and a bridle in the jaws," of every man; "nor can any have even the smallest power against us, except it be given him from above."

But notwithstanding our assurance of divine protection, we ought to take all prudent precautions to avoid the fury of our enemies, and to avail ourselves of those methods of escape which God in his providence has opened to us. "If they persecute us in one city, we should flee to another," and like Paul, when "let down by the wall in a basket," elude the resentment which we cannot pacify. We must not indeed deny Christ, or decline any duty, even though death should be the inevitable and immediate consequence of our fidelity: but we must never court death, if we have an opportunity of saving our lives by privacy or flight.]

INFER

1. What need have all Christ's followers to count the cost before they take up a profession of religion!

[Ministers indeed, for the most part, are called to stand foremost in the post of danger, and to bear the brunt of the battle: but every soldier of Christ is called to "endure hardness," and to "fight a good fight." If by our life and conversation we condemn the world, though the reproof be tacit, and rather intimated than expressed, the world will be filled with wrath against us; and, if suffered by God, will persecute us unto death. Let us then know what we are to expect, and stand at all times prepared for the worst.]

2. What a ground of thankfulness should we esteem it, if we are in any measure divested of carnal prejudice!

[All of us, if not restrained by God, should, like the Nazarenes, be ready to vent our indignation even against Christ himself, if he uttered any truths offensive to our ears. What a mercy then is it if we can hear our sins condemned, and have our indignation turned against *them*, rather than against our faithful Monitor! Let us cultivate this disposition, whether it respects the public preaching of the word, or private admonition. Against our sins we cannot manifest too much displeasure. Happy would it be for us, if by one act of zeal we could dispatch them utterly. Let us at least set ourselves against them without delay, and prosecute them from henceforth without intermission, and without mercy.]

^b Acts xxiii. 12, 13, 16—24. Acts xii. 5--8.

CCLXXXII. THE DRAUGHT OF FISHES.

LUKE v. 8—11. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of fishes which they had taken: and so was also James and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.*

THE miracles of our Lord were such as did not admit of intrigue or collusion—Not only men on earth, but even the fishes of the sea were subject to his power—Of this we have abundant evidence in the preceding context—We shall make some observations on

I. The miracle

The occasion of the miracle is worthy of notice

[The people had attended on a week day to hear our Lord—And Peter, after toiling all the preceding night, had preferred instruction before his necessary rest—Thus will all who are concerned about their souls, rather strain a point to attend the house of God, than invent excuses for neglecting divine worship—Nor will they find reason, in the issue, to regret their labour—Sooner would Jesus work a miracle in their favour, than suffer his faithful followers to wait upon him in vain—]

The miracle itself was both seasonable and instructive.

[Peter little thought why he had been suffered to labour all night in vain—But his ill success tended greatly to illustrate the power of Jesus^a—The draught of fishes shewed, that Jesus had the whole creation under his control—that in seasons of darkness and despondency we may obtain help from him—that they who follow his directions may expect his support—and that he should ever be the supreme object of our love and confidence—]

II. The conduct of Peter on the occasion

Peter on this occasion shewed a mixture of humility and ignorance

[Our Lord's display of his glory excited astonishment in all—But Peter was more occupied about his soul than about his

^a See John xi. 4, 6, 15, 39, 43.

his unexpected acquisitions—Thus, if the heart be upright, prosperity will not turn the soul from God any more than adversity—Peter however was apprehensive that his unworthiness might provoke this heavenly messenger to destroy him—On this account he intreated Jesus to depart from him—But he should rather have intreated his continuance with him; that through his instruction and assistance he might obtain the pardon of his sins, and victory over his corruptions—]

Our Lord overlooked his ignorance and rewarded his humility

[God has often turned away from men on account of their pride—But never on account of their self-loathing and self-abhorrence—Nothing is more pleasing to God than unfeigned humility—Our Lord therefore would not take Peter at his word—On the contrary he now called Peter to become his constant attendant—]

III. The application which our Lord made of the miracle

The draught of fishes was intended as a figurative representation of what should be done by the gospel

[It is not judicious to look for a spiritual meaning where none was intended—But our Lord himself suggests the application of this miracle—He elsewhere compares the gospel to a net cast into the sea^b—And here intimates, that though his servants, if left to themselves, might in vain cast the gospel net, he would surely crown their labours with success—]

And an express promise of success was now given to Peter

[Peter's fears were dissipated by our Lord's exhortation—Indeed, by every dispensation, Jesus speaks in the same encouraging terms to contrite souls—None who bewail their own sinfulness have aught to fear from him—The promise of success in catching men could not but rejoice the soul of Peter—Who that knows the value of one soul would not labour night and day to secure it?—And how much more should we labour in hopes of saving many!—The promise was gloriously verified in Peter's first sermon^c—And shall be verified to all whom Jesus has commissioned to preach his gospel—]

IV. The effect produced on Peter and his associates

They gladly left all to follow Christ

[They knew that the power now exercised by Jesus could provide for their wants—And felt that the goodness manifested by him demanded their services—They willingly therefore relinquished

^b Matt. xiii. 47.

^c Acts ii. 41.

relinquished their all to attend on him—Nor was their sacrifice the less because it is small in our eyes—Being their “all,” it was as much as any man could part with—They never found reason to regret this sacrifice^d—Nor will any others who follow their example—]

Such is the effect which the miracles of Jesus should produce on us

[We have not indeed been called to part with our worldly possessions, and perhaps may never be—But we must be willing to do it, whenever the honour of Jesus requires the sacrifice—Surely his miracles of mercy demand this at our hands—We must devote ourselves wholly to his service—And if we obey his call in this respect, we shall assuredly dwell with him for ever^e—]

^d See Luke xxii. 35.

^e John xii. 26.

CCLXXXIII. AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT CAST OUT.

Luke iv. 33, 34. *And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil; and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?*

IF any doubt the existence and agency of devils, the history before us is well calculated to satisfy them upon that head—It is evident that though Satan spake by the mouth of the man whom he possessed, he spake in his own person, and in the name of those other spirits that were leagued with him—To represent this man as disordered with an epilepsy or falling sickness is to confound things which the evangelist was most careful to distinguish^a—Besides, we cannot conceive that a physician (for such was St. Luke) should mention it as a remarkable circumstance that a disorder “did not hurt” a man by leaving him^b; whereas, if we suppose this to have been a daemonic possession, the observation is just and proper; for we may be sure that when Satan threw down his poor vassal, he would have hurt, yea, killed

^a Ver. 40, 41.

^b Ver. 35.

killed him too, if Jesus, by an invisible but almighty agency, had not interposed to prevent it—There being many accounts of evil spirits cast out by our Lord, we shall not advert to *every* circumstance of this miracle, but endeavour to improve that particular incident mentioned in the text; viz. the request of Satan that Jesus would let him alone—In order to this we shall

I. State the grounds of Satan's request

In acknowledging Jesus to be "the Holy One of God," Satan might be actuated by a desire to bring the character of Jesus into suspicion, as though they were in confederacy with each other; or perhaps he wished to impress the people with an idea that none but madmen and dæmoniacs would make such an acknowledgement—But *in requesting* Jesus to let him alone he was instigated rather by his own fears—

1. He knew Jesus

[Jesus was like any other poor man; his own disciples, except on some extraordinary occasions, did not appear acquainted with his real character—But Satan knew him, notwithstanding the lowly habit in which he sojourned among men—He knew Jesus to be the Son of God, who had left the bosom of his Father, that he might take our nature, and dwell amongst us—He was well aware that this Holy One must of necessity feel an irreconcilable aversion to such an "unclean spirit," such a wicked fiend as he was; while at the same time there was no hope of prevailing against *him* either by fraud or violence—Hence he wished to be left to himself, and to be freed as much as possible from *his* interposition—]

2. He dreaded Jesus

[It is not impossible but that Satan's expulsion from heaven might have arisen from his refusal to do homage to the Son of God—However this be, he well knew that Jesus was "the promised seed," who should ultimately "bruise his head"—He had already been foiled in a conflict with this despised Nazarene, and had learned by experience the impossibility of resisting his command—Nor could he be ignorant that Jesus was to be his judge in the last day, when the full measure of his sins should be meted out to him, and his present miseries be greatly augmented—Hence, while he "believed, he trembled"—Hence those requests which he offered on other occasions, "Torment me not;" "send me not into the deep," that is, the depths of hell—Hence also that question, in the passage before us, "Art thou come to destroy

us?"—No wonder that, under such circumstances, he should be filled with terror, and ask, as the consummation of his highest wishes, to have a respite granted him—]

That such desires were not peculiar to Satan will appear, while we

II. Enquire whether similar requests be not offered by many amongst us

It is certain that many hate the declarations of Christ in his gospel

[Men will endure to hear those sins, from which they themselves are free, exposed and condemned; but when the light is brought to discover their besetting sins, they hate it, and wish to have it removed from them—This is found to be the case even in the public ministration of the word—But it obtains in a still higher degree in private and personal admonition—Let a servant of Christ come in his master's name to a man that is proud or covetous, lewd or dissipated, or under the dominion of any particular lust, and let him set before that man the enormity of his besetting sin, and the judgments denounced against it; will *he* find a welcome? will not the sinner wish to change the conversation? will he not say in his heart, perhaps too with his lips, Let me alone; what hast thou to do with me?—Will not he regard such a monitor as an enemy to his peace, and be ready to ask, "Art thou come to destroy" all my hope and comfort?—Yes; nor is this aversion to the light peculiar to the sensual and profane: it is rather found to be more inveterate among those, whose regularity in outward things has afforded them a ground for self-admiration and self-complacency—]

Such persons accord with Satan both in sentiment and inclination

[To hate the authority of Christ in his word is exactly the same as to hate his personal authority when he was upon earth: and to wish to have the light of his truth withheld from us, is the same as to desire the restraint of his personal interposition—Nor is this a mere fallible deduction of man's reason; it is the express declaration of God—They, who would not hear the law of the Lord, are represented by the prophet as saying to him, "Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, *cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us*"—Job speaks yet more plainly to the same effect: he represents those, who spent their days in wealth and pleasure, as saying to the Almighty, *Depart from us*, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways: what is the Almighty that we should serve him? and

what

what profit should we have if we pray unto him^d?—It is evident that not only the sentiments of these sinners, but also their very expressions, are almost the same with those of Satan in the text—]

To evince the folly of harbouring such dispositions we shall

III. Shew the inefficacy of such requests, by whomsoever they may be offered

It was in vain that Satan pleaded for a temporary liberty to indulge his malice

[Jesus would not even receive his acknowledgements, but peremptorily enjoined him silence—Nor would he suffer Satan to retain possession of his wretched slave—He would not even permit this cruel enemy to “hurt” him—So little were the wishes of Satan consulted by our Lord and Saviour—]

In vain also will be all our wishes to retain with impunity our beloved lusts

[God may indeed forbear to counteract us for a season, and say, Let him alone^e—When he sees that we “will none of him,” he may justly give us up to our own hearts lusts^f—But this would be the heaviest curse that he could inflict upon us—It would be even worse than immediate death, and immediate damnation; because it would afford us further opportunities of “treasuring up wrath” without any hope of obtaining deliverance from it—Besides, it would be only for a little time, and then “wrath would come upon us to the uttermost”—When we stand before the judgment-seat we shall in vain say, Let us alone; What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?—Our doom will then be fixed, and our sentence executed with irresistible power and inexorable firmness—When once we are “fallen into the hands of the living God,” all hope of impunity or compassion will have ceased for ever—]

This subject affords us occasion to suggest a word or two of ADVICE:

1. Rest not in a speculative knowledge of Christ

[We observe that Satan was well acquainted with the person and offices of Christ—But, notwithstanding all he knew, he was a devil still—To what purpose then will be all our knowledge, if we be not sanctified by it?—It will only aggravate our guilt, and consequently enhance our condemnation also—We never know Jesus aright till we love his presence, and delight in an unreserved compliance with his will—]

2. Endeavour

^d Job xxi. 13—15.

^e Hos. iv. 17.

^f Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12.

2. Endeavour to improve his presence for the good of your souls

[He comes to us in the preaching of his gospel—He has promised to be with us whenever we are assembled in his name—Shall we then either by our aversion or indifference say to him, Let us alone?—Let us rather say, Lord, expel this evil spirit from my heart; take me under thy care; and “fulfil in me all thy good pleasure”—Thus shall “the prince of this world be cast out;” and we, his poor vassals, be “brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God”]

CCLXXXIV. PETER'S WIFE'S MOTHER CURED.

Luke iv. 38, 39.—*And he arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house. And Simon's wife's mother was taken with a fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.*

HOWEVER much we may be beloved of God, we are not to expect an exemption from those troubles which are the common lot of humanity—Peter was one of the peculiar favourites of our Lord, and privileged to have more intimate access to him than almost any of the apostles—Yet we find severe affliction in his family—This affliction however tended in the issue (as all the trials of God's children will) to the glory of God and to his own personal benefit—This observation naturally arises from the account which we have just read respecting the miraculous recovery of his wife's mother through the interposition of our Lord—In discoursing upon it we may notice

I. The service which Jesus rendered her

She was seized with a very dangerous disorder

[Peter, an utter stranger to the doctrine since established in the church of Rome respecting the celibacy of the clergy, was a married man, and an eminent pattern both of filial piety and conjugal affection—The aged mother of his wife was permitted to spend her declining years with him—But her near connexion with this eminent servant of God could not preserve her from the common calamities of life—Nor could her son-in-law restore her by a miracle without an express

express commission from God himself^a—The circumstance of her being detained from the ordinances of God must doubtless have been a great additional trial to her mind, especially at a season, when he, who “spake as never man spake,” had come thither to instruct the people^b—Peter however saw no necessity for staying from the synagogue when his mother was properly attended at home—He the rather went; and availed himself of his access to Jesus to intercede for his afflicted relative—]

Jesus restored her to perfect health

[Jesus paid the same attention to the intercessions of friends as he did to men's personal applications—It was the delight of his soul to relieve misery wherever he found it—Nor did he think his work finished, when he had exercised his ministry in the house of God—He would not cease from labour while the continuance of his labours could be of any essential service—He could indeed have healed her by a word without going to her in person—But he delighted to visit the chambers of affliction—And behold! with what *condescension* he acted towards her, “he took her by the hand and lifted her up;” he, the maker and governor of the universe, administered unto her as if he had been her menial servant!—Yet with what *authority* did he rebuke and dispel the fever!—Who could act thus but God?—Instantly did the disease vanish, and her former strength return—And universal joy succeeded to the tears of sympathy and compassion—]

In what manner she endeavoured to requite this favour we shall see by considering

II. The service she rendered him

We do not estimate services by the intrinsic worth of them so much as by the affection manifested in them—In this view her services were as acceptable as any that could be rendered; “she arose and ministered unto them”—By this conduct she unwittingly discovered

1. The reality of the miracle

[Had she merely joined her family, the departure of her fever might have been imputed to a fortunate coincidence of

^a Perhaps the gift of miracles was not yet bestowed upon the church. But after it was, the apostles could only exercise that gift when they were moved by God to do so. Why else did Paul leave Trophimus at Miletum sick (2 Tim. iv. 20.) or suffer the sickness of his dear fellow-labourer Epaphroditus to proceed to such extremity? (Phil. ii. 7.)

^b The loss of divine ordinances was that which David chiefly regretted when he fled from Absalom, Ps. lxxxiv. 1—3.

of circumstances—Nor would they, who ascribed the expulsion of devils to the agency of Beelzebub, have been ashamed to adopt such a sentiment—But, if this had been the case, her body must have still continued in a state of debility—Whereas she was able to exert herself as much as before her sickness—This then was an unquestionable proof of the reality of the miracle^c—And she became a witness for Jesus while she intended nothing more than to testify her love towards him—]

2. The goodness of her own heart

[The hearts of all are, *strictly speaking*, most “desperately wicked”—But our Lord tell us that “a *good man* out of the *good treasure* of his heart bringeth forth *good things*”—In this sense she discovered much goodness of heart—So far from being puffed up with the favour conferred upon her, she was glad to execute the meanest offices—Her heart glowed with a desire to honour her benefactor—Nor was she unmindful of the obligations she owed to those who had assisted her, or interceded for her—She ministered not to *him* only, but to “*them*”—She rejoiced in an opportunity to testify her gratitude to all—How different was this from the conduct of the nine lepers^d!—Who does not reprobate them as the basest of mankind?—Whereas she did not delay one moment to testify her sense of the mercy vouchsafed to her—The one thought of her heart was, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me^e?”—O that all were like-minded with her in performing a duty which is so “lovely and of such good report!”—]

3. The duty of all who have received mercies from God

[God is to be acknowledged as much in the blessing given to our food or medicine, as in the more *visible* effects of his miraculous interpositions—Have we then been preserved in health, or restored from sickness? Surely we stand indebted to God as much as if a miracle had been wrought in our behalf—And shall we be satisfied with making a few cold acknowledgements, and not render any active services to our benefactor?—Or shall we pretend that there is nothing that we can do for him?—Let us do what our capacity and situation enable us to do—However mean the service, it shall be accepted of him—But if we be too proud to stoop, or too idle to exert ourselves, we violate the plainest law of our nature, and render ourselves unworthy of the Christian name^f—]

The

^c Matt. ix. 6—8.

^d Luke xvii. 17.

^e Ps. cxvi. 12.

^f Unthankfulness to God

is specified as the summit of wickedness even in the heathen world, Rom. i. 21.

The foregoing history may be *improved*

1. In a way of reproof

[There is not one of us who does not stand indebted to God for an infinite multitude of mercies—But in what manner have we requited him?—Perhaps “in the time of trouble we have visited him, and poured out a prayer when his chastening was upon us^g”—But no sooner has his rod been removed, than, like metal from the furnace, we have returned to our former hardness—We have resembled the hypocritical Jews, and forgotten all the vows which we made in trouble^h—Ah! what a contrast between us and this pious matron!—Let us be ashamed, and humble ourselves before God—Let us remember how awfully Hezekiah was punished for his ingratitudeⁱ—Let us instantly awake from our lethargy to the discharge of our duty—And “glorify Christ with our bodies and our spirits which are his”—]

2. In a way of consolation

[Whether we go up to God's house, or be confined on a bed of sickness, we may have access unto Jesus—He is with us at all times and in every place—And we may go to him with our petitions either for ourselves or others—What a rich source of consolation is this!—And have we no disorders, bodily or spiritual, which need his aid?—If our body be healthy, is not our soul languishing?—Or if we ourselves be lively, have we no friend or relative that is in a sickly condition?—Let us then apply to this almighty physician, and we shall find him as condescending and as gracious as ever—He calls himself by this endearing name, “The Lord that healeth thee^k”—He will “send his word and heal us;” yea, he will strengthen us for the most active and difficult services—Let all of us then surround his throne, and cry with united voices, “Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercy's sake^l”—]

^g Isai. xxvi. 16.

^h Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

^k Exod. xv. 26.

^l Ps. xlv. 26.

CCLXXXV. THE LEPER HEALED.

Mark i. 45. *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

THERE is certainly a great similarity between many of our Lord's miracles—

But

But there are in every one of them some circumstances that distinguish them from others—

And these open to us a wide field for appropriate and useful observations—

There are different accounts of lepers healed by the power of Jesus—

The text informs us of one whose manner of applying for relief, and of discovering his gratitude towards his benefactor, were very peculiar—

To elucidate the words before us we may enquire

I. What was “the matter which he so published and blazed abroad?”

A man came to our Lord to be cured of the leprosy

[The leprosy was a disorder which none but God could cure—

The man who was infected with it believed our Lord’s *ability* to heal him—

But he knew not the marvellous extent of his compassion—

Hence he doubted his *willingness* to bestow so great a blessing—

He submitted himself however to the will of this divine physician—

And with deepest humility implored his sovereign help^b—]

Our Lord with infinite condescension granted his request

[He was not extreme to mark the weakness of the leper’s faith—

But, “moved with compassion,” gave him the desired relief—

As a prophet of God he could touch the leper without contracting any defilement—

He declared that the disease should vanish at his command—

And instantly, by a touch, imparted soundness to the disordered body—]

He however accompanied the mercy with a solemn charge

II. What was the injunction given him respecting it

Our Lord directed him to go to the priest, and present immediately the accustomed offerings to God

[The

^a 2 Kings v. 7.

^b He came kneeling to him, falling on his face, and beseeching him. Compare Matt. viii. 2. Luke v. 12.

[The priests were appointed judges in all leprosy cases—
They were authorized to pronounce a man clean or unclean, according to certain marks laid down in the law of Moses^c—

When a man was acknowledged to be clean he was to present his offerings to God^d—

This therefore our Lord enjoined the leprosy man to do—
In doing it he would exact from the priest himself “a testimony” to the truth of the miracle that had been wrought—

And would give abundant evidence that the person who wrought it was not an enemy to the Mosaic law—

Yea, he would shew that the worker of this miracle was the Messiah himself—]

He charged him also not to divulge the matter to any one till he should have performed this service

[The injunction given by our Lord was as solemn and strict as possible^e—

Jesus desired to avoid all appearance of ostentation—

He wished also not to give umbrage to the state by increasing the number of his followers—

Moreover he was solicitous to guard against the malice of the priests—

He well knew that they, from their enmity to him, might be induced to deny the cure—

And thus they would cast a reflection upon him, and deprive the man of the liberty to which he was now entitled—

Hence with such solemnity and authority did he enjoin the leper silence—]

This charge however the leper did not sufficiently regard

III. What were the consequences of its being disobeyed

The man could not refrain from “publishing the matter” to all around him

[He felt in his body a consciousness of perfect health—
His soul was inflamed with gratitude to his merciful benefactor—

He never thought what reasons there might be for the prohibition—

The more he might suppose it to proceed from modesty the more would he be anxious to spread his fame—

To offer his appointed gift he went instantly with great gladness—

But he knew not how to check the ardour of his love and gratitude—

We

^c Lev. xiii. 1—46.

^d Lev. xiv, 2—32.

^e Ἐμβριμπίσμενος αὐτῷ, graviter interminatus ei, ver. 43.

We mean not however to justify his disobedience—

The word of God utterly condemns every deviation from the divine will^f—

But the leper's disobedience most assuredly sprang from a good principle—

Nor can we doubt but that the indulgent Saviour would readily pardon it—]

Though evil consequences ensued, yet were they overruled for good

[Our Lord's fame spread with great rapidity through all the country—

Hence he was much incommoded by the multitudes who flocked around him—

Nor "could he any more openly enter into the city by reason of them"—

He was forced to seek for solitude and retirement "in desert places"—

But the multitudes who came were desirous "to hear" his word^g—

And occasion was afforded by them for the working of many other miracles—

Thus great benefit accrued to the bodies, we trust also, to the souls, of many—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who feel themselves infected with the leprosy of sin

[The corruption of our hearts is often set forth under this figure—

Indeed so fatally has it spread, that we may well apply to ourselves that loathsome description^h—

In reference to this very disorder we may well exclaim with the prophetⁱ—

Let not any then, who feel the infection, hope to heal themselves—

The disorder bids defiance to every hand but God's—

Come then to Jesus, the almighty, the only physician—

Come to him, like the leper, with the deepest humility, and reverence—

Nor doubt his willingness any more than his power to heal you—

Wherefore came he from heaven but to seek and save the lost?—

Wherefore was the fountain of his blood opened, but for sin, and for uncleanness^k?—

Let

^f Dent. xxvii. 26.

^h Isai. i. 5, 6.

^k Zech. xiii. 1.

^g Luke v. 15.

ⁱ Isai. vi. 5.

Let the declaration he has made be most implicitly believed^l—

However polluted we be, he will condescend to touch us—

And by his sovereign power will remove the guilt and pollution of our sins—]

2. To those who hope that they have been healed of their leprosy

[There is no injunction upon you to conceal this matter from the world—

You are rather commanded to make it known to all around you—

Not that spiritual blessings should be a subject of ostentatious boasting—

But it never can be wrong to comply with that exhortation of the Psalmist^m—

Or to perform that very duty, for the promoting of which the mercy was vouchsafedⁿ—

Let every one then adopt the language of the blessed virgin^o—

But let there be also a conscientious regard to the commands of Jesus—

Whether we see the reasons of them or not, we must punctually observe them—

Even if silence be our duty, we should, however reluctantly obey^p—

Thus will Christ eventually be magnified in our conduct—

And sinners will be most effectually encouraged to flock unto him—]

^l John vi. 37.

^m Ps. cv. 1—3.

ⁿ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^o Luke ii. 46—48.

^p Matt. vii. 6. Ps. xxxix. 2.

CCLXXXVI. THE PARALYTIC HEALED.

Mark ii. 8—12. *And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith unto the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took*

up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

WE cannot wonder that such multitudes attended the ministry of our Lord—

Or that his occasional retirements from labour were so often interrupted—

But it is indeed astonishing that so many should continue hostile to so benevolent a person—

And that he should persist in doing good, when his words and actions were so constantly perverted, and made grounds of accusation against him—

Having retired to an house in Capernaum, he was soon encompassed with a crowd—

Amongst them were many Scribes and Pharisees who came only to cavil—

Our Lord, however, neither intimidated nor incensed, proceeded in his work—

And took occasion even from their cavils to display more eminently his power and glory—

Being accused of blasphemy, he confirmed his word by his works—

And multiplied his mercies to some as the means of convincing others—

The particular circumstances referred to in the text lead us to consider

I. The authority he exercised

Whatever miracles our Lord performed, he wrought them by his own power—

A man was brought to him to be healed of the palsy

[So afflicted was the man, that he was deprived of all use of his limbs—

His friends, who bore him on a bed, or couch, could not get access to Jesus^b—

They would not however relax their endeavours to obtain a cure—

They went by another way to the top of the house, and broke open the lattice—

And

^a Luke v. 17.

^b Ver. 3, 4.

And then let the man down into the midst of the room where Jesus was^c—

Nor did Jesus take offence at his intrusion, as though he were an unwelcome guest—

He, on the contrary, beheld their solicitude with approbation—

And richly recompensed the faith which had urged them to such benevolent exertions—

We read not indeed of any particular request made by the man or his friends—

But the very sight of such misery was sufficient to call forth our Lord's compassion—]

Jesus, healed not his disorder, but authoritatively forgave his sin

[All that the man thought of was, a restoration to *bodily* health—

But the divine physician in an instant healed his *soul*—

The disorder had probably been sent by God as a punishment for sin—

And Jesus removed his sin as incomparably the greater evil—

Yea, he spoke to the man in the most affectionate and condescending terms—

And gave him a comfortable assurance that his iniquities were forgiven—

How must the helpless dying man rejoice in such tidings!—

Surely, after this, he would scarcely wish to have his life prolonged—

At least, he would desire it only that he might glorify his Lord and Saviour—]

But this exercise of divine authority excited the indignation of the Pharisees

[It is possible that they might manifest in their countenances the reasonings of their hearts—

But Jesus needed not any external proof of their thoughts—

He

^c Their houses were scarcely ever above one or two stories high. Their roofs were flat, and guarded on every side with a battlement or balustrade, Deut. xxii. 8; thither the inhabitants used to retire for exercise; 2 Sam. xi. 2.; for conversation. Matt. x. 27.; for meditation and prayer, Acts x. 9. There were two ways of access to the top; one from the inside, by a lattice or trap-door, 2 Kings i. 2. the other by steps on the outside, Mark xiii. 15. Having easily ascended to the top, they forced open (*ἰξοβέξαιτες*, ver. 4.) the lattice which was fastened within, and let down the man through the tiling (Luke v. 19) with which the roof was paved on all sides of the lattice. Some explain the matter somewhat differently. See Doddridge, sect. 45. note (e.)

He "knew in his spirit" every thing that passed within their minds—

They inwardly condemned him as guilty of "blasphemy"—

Nor was their reasoning defective, if the application of it had been just—

Certainly none but God has any authority to forgive sin—

And any mere creature that should assume it, would be a blasphemer—

But their objection, in this instance, was altogether unfounded—]

Jesus, having claimed the power of forgiving sin, immediately stated

II. His vindication of it

Our Lord was ever willing to satisfy those who desired information—

And, by multiplied proofs, to leave determined infidels without excuse—

He now stated a criterion whereby they might judge of the propriety of his claim

[When Jehovah's Deity was degraded, his servant Elijah proposed a mean of determining the controversy between him and Baal^d—

Thus our Lord condescended to submit his pretensions to a trial—

He appealed to all whether the healing of the paralytic would not be an evidence of divine power?—

And whether he, who by his own authority could restore man to health, were not equally able to forgive his sin?—

This was as just a criterion as could possibly be proposed—

If Jesus were not God, he could never *by his own power* heal the man—

Nor, if he were a blasphemer, would God work such a stupendous miracle to confirm his blasphemies—

Thus his claims to divine authority were brought to the test—

And every person present was made a competent judge of their truth or falsehood—]

According to that criterion, he immediately vindicated his divine authority

[He commanded the man to arise, and take up his couch, and go home—

Instantly he, who before could not help himself, was restored to health—

And,

^d 1 Kings xviii. 21—24.

And, in the presence of all, went forth with his couch upon his shoulders—

Thus were the enemies of Jesus effectually put to silence—

Yet none understood the full extent of the conclusion to be drawn from the miracle—

They still viewed Christ only as a “*man*” acting by a delegated authority^e—

Whereas they should have acknowledged him to have been truly *God*—

They all however “*glorified God*” for the marvellous displays of his power—

And confessed that they had never before seen such stupendous works—]

INFER

1. Jesus is as able, and as willing now to forgive sins, as ever he was

[When he sojourned on earth as a poor man, he had power to forgive sin—

And often exercised that power unsolicited, uncontrolled—

He even subjected himself to the charge of blasphemy rather than he would conceal his right—

Has he then less power or compassion now that he is enthroned in glory?—

Or, now that he is exalted on purpose to exercise that power^f, will he neglect to exert it?—

Will he who bestowed mercy *unasked*, cast out our petitions?—

Let us then present ourselves before him with all our miseries and wants—

Let us try, by all possible means, to get access to him—

Let us break through every obstacle that would defeat our endeavours—

And let us approach him with an assurance of his power and willingness to save—

Sooner shall heaven and earth fail, than he reject *one* such a believing suppliant^g—]

2. We have reason to be thankful for any affliction that brings us to him

[If the paralytic had never been disordered, he had never been brought to Jesus—

Had he never come to Jesus, his sins had never been forgiven—

Would he not then rejoice to this hour that God had sent him that affliction?—

Would he not number that amongst his richest mercies?—

Thus

^e Matt. ix. 8.

^f Acts v. 31.

^g Matt. xxi. 22.

Thus many of us would never have thought of Jesus if we had not known trouble—

But through temporal afflictions we were brought to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings—

Let those then, who have experienced this, give thanks to God^h—

And let those, that are now in trouble, seek chiefly the remission of their sinsⁱ—]

3. We have all possible encouragement to intercede for ungodly friends

[Many of us, alas! have friends whose souls are dead in trespasses and sins—

Their faculties are altogether destitute of spiritual motion or sensation—

But we may bring them by faith into the presence of the compassionate Jesus—

He will be pleased, rather than offended, with our officious intrusion—

Nor shall our labours of love be without many good effects—

Little do we think how many thousands have been converted in answer to the intreaties of God's praying people—

And who can tell but that God may fulfil to us that promise^k?—

Who can tell but that we may see our friends healed of their sins, and triumphing in their blessed Saviour?—

We are sure, at least, that our "prayers shall return into our own bosom"—

Let us then improve our knowledge of the Redeemer's grace—

And exert ourselves, that all around us may participate his saving benefits—]

^h Ps. cxix. 71, 75.

ⁱ Ps. xxv. 18.

^k James v. 15.

CCLXXXVII. THE MAN HEALED AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

John v. 14. *Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

MOST men will make good resolutions in a season of affliction—But few carry them into execution when they have obtained deliverance—They, however, to whom

troubles are sanctified will remember the vows that are upon them—They will repair as soon as possible, not to houses of dissipation or amusement, but to “the temple” of God—And, while others are only hardened by their mercies, *these* will be favoured with fresh manifestations of God’s love—The man whom our Lord addressed in the text, experienced this—When he was returning thanks for the cure he had received in his body, Jesus instructed him for the good of his soul—We shall consider

I. The cure wrought for him

Bethesda was a pool that possessed very singular qualities

[The name Bethesda signifies an house of mercy—The pool so called had the property of healing all manner of disorders—Its healing operations, however, were confined to certain seasons—They depended also on the agency of a superior power^a—And were limited to the first person that went into it after its waters were agitated by an angel—Multitudes of diseased persons constantly attended there—And five porches were built for their accommodation—When that healing power was first given to it cannot be ascertained—Probably God had but a few years before endued it with those qualities, in order to prepare the people for their Messiah, and to typify his works—]

In the porches around this pool an impotent man had long waited in vain

[He had laboured under an infirmity thirty-eight years—And had long attended there in hopes of a cure—But he had no friend to help him with sufficient speed—Nor had the people charity enough to let him take his turn—Every one consulted his own good in preference to his—And thus his efforts were daily frustrated, and his hopes continually deferred—]

But Jesus seeing him, wrought a miracle in his favour

[Jesus needed no solicitations to excite his pity—Though unasked, he tendered the man effectual relief—Little indeed did the man understand the import of our Lord’s question^b—But Jesus uttered the irresistible command—And instantly was health restored to his diseased body—Yea, he, who but the moment before could not get into the pool for want of help,

NOW

^a To ascribe them to the blood of the sacrifices stirred up in the water by a messenger from the temple, only seems to what wretched shifts infidelity is often driven by its desire to explain away the miracles of Christ.

^b Ver. 6, 7.

now easily took up his bed and walked—Nor was he intimidated by those who accused him of violating the sabbath—He rightly judged that the person who had power to heal him thus miraculously, had also authority to direct his conduct—]

For a short season the man knew not the name of his benefactor—But soon after enjoyed an interview with him in the temple—On this occasion the Evangelist relates

II. The advice given to him

It was sin which had brought this infirmity upon him

[God often punishes transgressors even in this life^c—This was extremely common under the Jewish economy—Nor are there wanting instances under the Christian dispensation^d—If we could dive into the secrets of God, it is probable we should trace many of our troubles to sin as their proper source—]

Nevertheless this did not preclude the exercise of mercy towards him

[Jesus was full of compassion even to the most unworthy—He often selected such to be the chief objects of his mercy^e—Indeed, the displaying of his sovereignty, and grace, is a principal end of all his dispensations^f—]

But he solemnly cautioned him against sin in future

[Though Jesus pities sinners, he abhors their sin—Nor will he accept the persons of those who live in it^g—He reminded the man of the deliverance he had experienced—And guarded him against the cause of his past calamities—This admonition too he enforced with a most weighty argument—The years of misery that the cripple had endured were nothing in comparison of hell torments—These will hereafter be the recompence of sin—Nor will any feel them so bitterly as backsliders and apostates^h—]

ADDRESS

I. Those who are under the pressure of bodily or spiritual infirmities

[Jesus possesses the same power still over bodily diseases—And will render the skill of earthly physicians subservient to the welfare of those who call upon him—But the infirmities of our souls are incomparably more grievous—Yet these also can he heal by the word of his mouth—If he only speak the word, we shall become new creatures—*His ordinances shall be*

^c Ps. cvii. 17, 18.

^e 1 Tim. i. 13—16.

^g Luke vi. 46.

^d 1 Cor. xi. 30.

^f Eph. ii. 7.

^h Job xxxvi. 13.

be to us as Bethesda's pool—Nor is it the most active, but the most humble that shall obtain the cure—Let us then tarry his leisure with meekness and patience—Let us never needlessly absent ourselves from his house—We know not the time that he will come to our help—But his word to every one of us is, “Wilt thou be made whole?”—His servants are ready to render us all needful assistance—And if it be not utterly our own fault, we may all become monuments of his healing mercy—]

2. Those who have experienced any signal deliverance

[Temporal deliverances should be remembered by us with gratitude—And we should be glad to acknowledge them in the house of Godⁱ—If we have received spiritual mercies, we have still more abundant cause for thankfulness—Let our renewed faculties then be ever devoted to God's service—Let us remember also that we are in danger of turning back from God—And how terrible must our state be if we should do so^k!—Let the mercies of God then allure us, and his terrors persuade us—Let us endeavour to resemble him whom the apostles healed^l—And soon we shall dwell where we shall know infirmity no more^m—]

ⁱ How many desire the prayers of their friends and of the congregation, who never afterwards desire them to render thanks for mercies received!

^k 2 Pet. ii. 20—22.

^l Acts iii. 8.

^m Isai. xxxiii. 24.

CCLXXXVIII. THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND.

Mark iii. 5—7. *And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea.*

THE exercise of benevolence is, in itself, calculated to excite universal admiration—But it is far from producing that effect on those who are blinded by prejudice or passion—They whose conduct is reprov'd by it will rather take occasion from it to vent their spleen the more—This our Lord uniformly experienced from the Pharisees—A remarkable instance of it is recorded in the text—Let us

I. Consider

I. Consider the circumstances of the miracle

The Pharisees, observing our Lord's intention to heal a man who had a withered hand, questioned his right to do so on the sabbath day

[Wishing to accuse him of inconsistency, or a contempt of the law, they asked him whether it were lawful to heal on the sabbath^a?—Our Lord shewed them that it was^b—He then asked them, Whether, while they condemned him for doing so benevolent an action on the sabbath, they were more justified in indulging murderous purposes against him on the sabbath^c?—They, unable to answer except to their own confusion, “held their peace”—Though convinced of their unreasonableness and impiety, they would not confess it—]

Our Lord beheld their obstinacy with indignation and grief

[Meek as our Lord was, he was susceptible of anger—Yet that anger was not like the passion that too often agitates us—It was perfectly just and righteous—Sin was the object against which it was directed—And, while he was angry with the sin, he mourned over the sinner—Hereafter indeed his anger will be unmixed with any pity—But now it is, as ours also should ever be, tempered with compassion towards the offending person—]

Not intimidated by their malice, he proceeded to heal the withered hand

[He bade the man stand forth in the midst of all—Surely such a pitiable object should have engaged all to interest themselves with Christ on his behalf—He then ordered him to stretch forth his hand—The man, notwithstanding he knew his inability to do it of himself, attempted to obey—And in the attempt received an instantaneous and perfect cure—]

Having thus more than ever exasperated his enemies, Jesus retired from their rage

[One would have thought that all should have adored the author of such a benefit—But, instead of this, the Pharisees were “filled with madness^d”—Alas! what wickedness is there in the human heart!—They joined immediately with the Herodians in a conspiracy against his life^e—But our Lord's hour was not yet come—He withdrew therefore from their power—And thus defeated, for the present at least, their efforts against him—]

Having

^a Matt. xii. 10.

^b Ib. ver. 11, 12.

^c Ver. 4. This seems the true import of his question.

^d Luke vi. 11.

^e The Herodians and Pharisees differed so widely both in their political and religious sentiments, that they hated each other exceedingly. But what enemies will not unite against Jesus? Luke xxiii. 12.

Having thus touched upon the principal incidents in the miracle, we shall proceed to

II. Deduce some practical observations from it

1. We should never be diverted from the path of duty by the fear of man

[Our Lord never desisted from his work through fear of giving offence—Nor should any of his followers ever regard the threats of their persecutors—They may safely commit themselves to God—If they fear HIM, they have no reason to fear any other^f—Duty is theirs; events are his—And if he permit their enemies to prevail, he will compensate all their sufferings with present consolations and everlasting rewards^g—Let all then suffer hardship as good soldiers—And be willing to follow Christ to imprisonment or death—]

2. We should never decline our duty from an apprehension of our inability to perform it

[If the man had refused to put forth his hand, it is probable he would have been left without the cure—But he saw that it was his duty to attempt whatever Christ commanded—And in endeavouring to comply he received strength sufficient—Thus when called to repent and believe, we must not be satisfied with saying, I am not able—Ministers cannot convert souls, yet they must preach the word^h—And others must expect to obtain grace, not in idle complainings, but in diligent exertions—Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee lightⁱ—]

3. If persecuted for doing the will of God, we may avoid the storm which we cannot avert

[Jesus himself frequently hid himself when they sought to kill him—He directed his disciples to flee from their persecutors^k—And his apostles, however willing to die, avoided, when they could, the fury of their enemies^l—Thus we also may shun the violence of persecution—Though we must be willing to die for him, we must not court death—Life is a precious gift to be improved for him—Let us preserve it therefore, while we can do so with a good conscience—And cheerfully lay it down when called to sacrifice it for his sake—]

CONCLUSION

[Some may ask, Who is sufficient for these things^m?—We answer, No man is, of himselfⁿ—But let those, whose powers are withered, apply to Christ—In endeavouring to do his will, we shall be enabled to do it—We shall do all things through him who strengtheneth us^o—]

^f Matt. x. 28. Isai. li. 7, 8, 12, 13.

^g 1 Pet. iv. 13, 14.

^h Eph. v. 14.

ⁱ Acts ix. 25.

ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^k Ezek. xxxvii. 3, 4.

^l Matt. x. 23.

^m 2 Cor. ii. 16.

^o Phil. iv. 13.

CCLXXXIX. THE CENTURION'S SERVANT HEALED.

Luke vii. 6, 7. *Then Jesus went with them: and when he was not far from the house, the Centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof; wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.*

NOTHING makes a wider breach among men than a difference in political and religious opinion—

But mutual good offices would greatly counteract this evil—

Though we can never hope to soften the rancour of all, we may by persevering kindness conciliate the esteem of many—

We have before us a remarkable instance of the efficacy of such conduct—

The Centurion was an heathen, an officer of an hostile nation, stationed in Judea to keep the Jews in subjection—

But instead of oppressing the Jews he had shewed them much favour—

He, in his turn, needed their good offices on behalf of his servant—

And they gladly became his advocates and intercessors—

They even prevailed on Jesus to work a miracle on his behalf—

To elucidate this miracle we shall consider

I. The Centurion's character

Soldiers, for the most part, are unfavourably circumstanced with respect to religion—

But here was one, though an heathen, whose character may well put to shame the greater part of the Christian world—We may observe

1. His love to his fellow-creatures

[His servant was grievously afflicted with the palsy nigh unto death^a—

In this disorder, persons can do nothing for others, or even for themselves—

And in such a state, even dear friends and relatives are ready to think the care of one an heavy burthen—

Yet

^a Compare Matt. viii. 6. with Luke vii. 2.

Yet this Centurion administered to his servant with the tenderest affection—

And interested all he could in the promotion of his welfare^b—

What could the servant himself have done more for the kindest master ?]

2. His piety towards God

[He had not embraced either the doctrines or discipline of the Jewish church—

But he had learned to acknowledge the only true God—

And he was glad to promote the worship of God, even though he himself did not acquiesce in the peculiar mode in which he was worshipped—

He even built a synagogue for the Jews at his own expense^c—

What an admirable pattern of liberality and candour !—

How different from those who will not do any thing without the pale of their own church !—

Surely he never afterwards regretted that he had so applied his wealth—]

3. His low thoughts of himself

[He did not arrogate any thing to himself on account of his rank and authority—

Nor did he value himself on his benevolence to man and zeal for God—

While others judged him worthy that a miracle should be wrought for him, he accounted himself unworthy of the smallest favour—

This was the reason of his forbearing to wait on our Lord in person^d—

How lovely does such an one appear in the eyes of God and man !—]

4. His exalted thoughts of Christ

[He judged our Lord to be too holy to admit of converse with an heathen—

He believed also that Jesus could effect whatsoever he pleased, by a word, and at a distance, without the intervention of any means^e—

Nor did he doubt but that universal nature was subject to his will far more than the most obedient soldier could be to the commands of his officer^f—

Thus

^b He applied to some of the Jewish elders to use their interest with Jesus on his behalf.

^c Ver. 5.

^d On our Lord's near approach to the house, the same humility that had kept the Centurion from going to him, compelled him, as it were, to go, lest he should seem guilty of disrespect. Compare Matt. viii. 13, with the text.

^e Ver. 7.

^f Ver. 8.

Thus did he ascribe to Jesus a power proper to God alone^g—

Well might our Lord's address to the discreet Scribe have been applied to him^h—]

Such a character as this could never meet with a repulse from Jesus

II. The kindness vouchsafed to him by our Lord

Instantly at the request of the elders Jesus set off to the Centurion's house—

He who, though repeatedly importuned, declined to visit a *Nobleman's son*ⁱ, went, at the very first summons, to attend upon a *Centurion's servant*—

And no sooner met the Centurion, than he richly recompensed his assiduity

1. He expressed his admiration of the Centurion's faith

[We never hear of Jesus admiring the things of this world—

He rather checked in his disciples such ill-judged veneration^k—

But when he beheld the Centurion's faith, "he marvelled at it"^l—

Not that such exercise of grace was *really* unexpected by him—

Jesus both knew what was in the Centurion's heart^l, and had planted there the very grace which he exercised^m—

But Jesus, as our exemplar, would teach *us* what to admire—

And shew *us* that the smallest portion of true faith cannot be estimated too highlyⁿ—

Our Lord declared in his very presence, that this faith had not been equalled by any even of the Israelites themselves^o—

Such approbation from *his* mouth could not fail of comforting the afflicted Centurion—]

2. He wrought the desired miracle in confirmation of his faith

[By a simple act of his will he restored the servant to perfect health—

And told the Centurion that it should "be to him according to his faith"^l—

Thus he removed the distress of the family in an instant—

Thus too he confirmed the faith which had shone forth so nobly—

And

^g Deut. xxxii. 39.

^h John iv. 46--50.

ⁱ John ii. 25.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 1.

^h Mark xii. 34.

^k Mark xiii. 1, 2.

^m John i. 16.

^o Ver. 9.

And shewed that we could never expect too much at his hands—

What advantage for *eternal* life did the Centurion derive from hence!—

With what lively hope might he apply to Jesus for the healing of his soul!—

We can never suppose that such love and piety, such humility and faith, were left to perish—

No, verily—That declaration shall be found true to all eternity^p—]

3. He declared that many such persons should be saved, while many, with clearer light and higher privileges, should be cast out

[They who profess the true religion may be called “the children of the kingdom”—

But how many of them are destitute of the attainments this heathen had made!—

How many would have imitated that vile Amalekite rather than him^q!—

How many grudge the necessary *contributions* for *keeping up* the houses of God^r!—

What doubting of Christ's power and grace, yea, what a proud conceit too of their own worthiness, is to be found among professing Christians!—

Surely what our Lord said respecting the unbelieving Jews shall be realized in Christians of this character^s—

And the humbler heathens, who walked agreeably to the light that they enjoyed, shall be preferred before them—

Nor can we doubt but that the Centurion, in reference to whom these things were spoken, shall be among that blessed number—]

APPLICATION

[Let us then learn to plead earnestly for ourselves — — —

Nor let a sense of unworthiness keep us from carrying our wants to Jesus — — —

Let us also sympathize with, and intercede for others—

Job, like the Centurion, found benefit from his own intercessions^t—

Nor shall *our* supplications be in vain either for ourselves or others—]

^p 1 Sam. ii. 30.

^q 1 Sam. xxx. 13.

^r What a contrast to him who, *entirely at his own expense, erected a synagogue for people of another communion!*

^s Matt. viii. 12.

^t Job xlii. 10.

CCXC. THE WIDOW'S SON RAISED.

Luke vii. 14—16. *And he came and touched the bier; and they that bare him, stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people.*

THE more faithful any servant of God is, the more he will abound in labours—

Of those who were men of like passions with us, none ever equalled St. Paul—

But our blessed Lord far exceeded all the children of men—

No day elapsed without fresh manifestations of his power and compassion—

He had on the preceding day raised the Centurion's servant from a bed of sickness—

Now we behold him employed in restoring a dead man to life—

We shall consider

I. The miracle

The Jews used to bury their dead without the precincts of their cities—

At the gate of the city Nain Jesus met a funeral procession—

The principal mourner that followed it engaged his attention—

[She was a mother following *her own son* to the grave—

How afflictive is such an event to a tender parent!—

This son had *grown up to the estate of manhood*—

We may see in David's lamentations for Absalom what an affliction this is!—

Her loss was further aggravated in that this was her *only* child—

If one out of many had died, she would have been deeply grieved: how much more in losing him, in whom her affections had so long centered!—

That which added tenfold poignancy to her sorrow was, that she was *a widow*—

When her husband had died she had been consoled by her surviving child—

But now she had none left to be the support and comfort of declining years—

Destroyed both root and branch, she had no prospect but that her name would be extinct in Israel—]

Filled with compassion he wrought a miracle on her behalf

[Jesus, addressing himself to the mourning widow, bade her not weep—

How vain, how impertinent had such advice been, if given by a common man!—

But, from him, it came as a rich cordial to her fainting spirit—

He then stopped the procession, and said to the dead man, Arise—

Nor were the hopes, occasioned by his interference, disappointed—

On other occasions he wrought his miracles at the request of others^a—

This he performed *spontaneously*, and unsolicited by any— Nothing moved him to it but that very compassion which brought him down from heaven—

Nor did he exercise this power in the name of another^b—

He spake *authoritatively*, as one who could quicken whom he would^c—

Nor did he merely recal the soul without renovating the body^d—

The restoration to life and vigour was effected *perfectly*, and in an instant^e—

To complete the mercy, “he delivered the man to his mother”—

And preferred the comfort of the widow to the honour he himself might have gained in retaining such a follower—]

Such a stupendous miracle could not fail of exciting suitable emotions

II. The effect it produced

There is little in the scriptures to gratify our curiosity—
Hence

^f ^a Intercession was made for Jairus's daughter, by her own *father*; for the Centurion's servant, by his *friends*; for the paralytic, by his *neighbours*; but none besought him for this distressed widow.

^b Elijah and Elisha obtained this power by prayer, 1 Kings xvii. 21. 2 Kings iv. 33.; and Peter wrought his miracles in the name of Jesus, Acts iii. 6. and ix. 34.

^c John v. 21.

^d 2 Kings, iv. 34, 35.

^e “He sat up, and began to speak.”

Hence we are not told what the man spake, or how the mother was affected at the first interview with her son—

But, if *once* she forgot her pangs for joy that he was born, how much more her sorrows *now*—

Doubtless the scene must have been inexpressibly interesting

[We may conceive Jesus, meekly majestic, delivering the man to his mother—

But it is not easy to conceive the first emotions of their minds—

Nature would stimulate the reunited relatives to expressions of mutual endearment—

Grace, on the other hand, would rather lead them first to admire and adore their benefactor—

Perhaps, looking alternately on Jesus and on each other, they might stand fixed in silent astonishment—

We need not however dwell on that which, at best, is mere conjecture—]

The effect produced on the multitude is recorded for our instruction

1. They were all filled with fear

[The people that attended Jesus, and those who followed the funeral, meeting together, the concourse was very great—

And one impression pervaded the whole body—

The fear which came upon them was a reverential awe—

This is natural to man, when he beholds any signal appearance of the Deity—

It is equally produced whether God appear in a way of judgment or of mercy^f—

Somewhat of this kind is felt by the seraphim before the throne^g—

And it would be more experienced by us, if we realized more the divine presence^h—

When it is excited only by some visible display of the Deity, it will generally vanish with the occasion—

But when it is caused by faith, it will abide and influence our whole conduct—

Happy would it be for us if we were continually thus impressedⁱ—]

2. They glorified God

[They did not know that Jesus was indeed a divine person—

But they manifestly saw that he was “a great prophet”—

And

^f Compare Acts v. 11. and Luke i. 65.

^h Jer. x. 6, 7.

^g Isai. vi. 2.

ⁱ Prov. xxviii. 14.

And that God, after suspending all miraculous interpositions for above three hundred years, had again "visited his people"—

In these tokens of God's favour they could not but rejoice—

Doubtless they congratulated each other on this glorious event—

And gave vent to their gratitude in devoutest adorations—

We have reason indeed to fear that these impressions were soon effaced—

Happy had they been if they had retained this heavenly disposition—

But who has not reason to regret, that mercies produce too transient an effect upon his mind?—

Let us at least profit by the example they *then* set us—

And labour to glorify God for the inestimable mercies he has conferred upon us—]

IMPROVEMENT

1. This history may teach us to sit loose to the things of this life

[If we possess personal and family mercies, let us be thankful for them.

The continuance of them is no less a favour than the restoration of them would be—

But let us not inordinately fix our affections upon any created good—

We know not how soon our dearest comforts may become the occasion of our deepest sorrows—

The case of Job affords a striking admonition to men in all ages^k—

Let us then endeavour to practise that advice of the apostle^l—

And place our affections on those things which will never be taken from us^m—]

2. It shews us whither we should flee in a season of deep affliction

[As no physicians could restore the widow's son, so none could heal her wounded spirit—

But there was one at hand, when she little thought of it, that could do both—

That same Almighty Deliverer is ever nigh unto us—

And calls us to himself when we are bowed down with troubleⁿ—

Let us then call upon him under every spiritual or temporal affliction—

And,

^k Job i. 13—19.

^m Col. iii. 2.

^l 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

ⁿ 1 s. l. 15. Matt. xi. 28.

And, with a conviction of his all-sufficiency, let us say with Peter^o—]

3. We may take occasion from it to bless God for the preached gospel

[The word of Christ in his gospel is as powerful as in the days of his flesh—

It quickens many who were dead in trespasses and sins—

It rescues them from the *second death*, and awakens them to an *eternal life*—

How many have seen the souls, over which they had long mourned, called forth to life by the almighty voice of Jesus!—

Let the whole multitude of us then “fear the Lord and his goodness^p”—

Let us glorify him for sending us such an adorable Saviour—

And let us seek, both for ourselves and others, fresh displays of his power and grace—]

^o John vi. 68, 69.

^p Hos. iii. 5.

CCXCI. THE BLIND AND DUMB DÆMONIAC HEALED.

Matt. xii. 22, 23. *Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?*

THE power of Satan is far greater than is generally supposed—In the days of our Lord it was exercised in a visible and most tremendous manner—Perhaps God suffered him to display his power *then* more than at any former period, in order that the triumphs of Jesus over him might be more manifest—We have reason to be thankful that since the apostolic age a considerable restraint has been imposed upon him—Still, however, he retains a fatal power over the souls of men—Nor is any human strength sufficient to counteract his malignant efforts—To Jesus alone can we look for deliverance from him—He alone who rescued this dæmoniac from his oppression, can deliver us—

From the miracle before us we shall take occasion to shew

I. What

I. What power Satan still exercises over mankind

Though he is not permitted to vex their bodies, he too successfully assaults their souls

He blinds them

[It is expressly asserted in the scripture, that he is the "God of this world who blinds the eyes of unbelievers"^a—Through his agency they are kept from discerning their *duty*, their *interest*, and their *happiness*—One would suppose that none need to be told, That it is their *duty* to love and serve God, and to cleave stedfastly to their Lord and Saviour; that it is their highest *interest* to seek the favour of God and an everlasting inheritance—And, that there is no *happiness* to be compared with the enjoyment of God's presence, and the prospect of his glory—Yet these things they cannot see—They are even foolishness to the natural man^b—And the broken cisterns which can hold no water are preferred before the fountain of living waters^c—What a lamentable proof of the darkness of their understandings, and the blindness of their hearts^d!—]

He makes them dumb

[The tongue is justly called "our glory," because it is the member whereby we most glorify God^e—But, as far as respects this use of our tongue, we are as dumb as the very beasts—We speak not *to* God in fervent prayer and praise, notwithstanding our daily wants should stimulate us to the one, and our daily mercies to the other—We speak not *of* God to our friends and families, but prefer every other topic of conversation—We speak not *for* God in the world, even though we witness the indignity with which he is every where treated—Were we to hear our friend or father insulted thus we should endeavour to vindicate their honour—But for God and his glory we feel no concern—And whence is this but from the agency of that "Spirit, who ruleth in all the children of disobedience"^f?—]

We need not however be cast down, if we consider

II. That all who apply to Jesus shall surely obtain deliverance

Our blessed Lord is as able and willing to help us as ever

[Nothing could withstand the energy of his word when he was on earth—Nor did any make application to him in vain—

^a 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^c Jer. ii. 13.

^e Ps. xxx. 12.

^b 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Eph. iv. 18.

^f Eph. ii. 2.

vain—Is then his strength impaired now that he is in heaven?—Is not all power in heaven and in earth committed to him on purpose that he may exert it on behalf of his church^s?—And has he not the same zeal for his Father's glory and our good, which originally brought him down from heaven and induced him to submit to death for us?—Surely then we have no reason to doubt his ability or willingness to help us in the time of need—]

Nor shall any make their application to him in vain

[His ready compliance with the requests of all the multitudes who came unto him, may justly warrant us to expect relief at his hands—Yea, there are many living witnesses of his power and grace from whose success we may derive encouragement—However blind we have been, he will open the eyes of our understanding—However impotent we have been with respect to the right use of our tongue, he will loose our tongue that we may speak plainly—He will fulfil to us his promises beyond our most sanguine expectations; “Our eyes that were blind shall be opened, and our tongues that were dumb shall sing^h”—]

No sooner shall we obtain deliverance than we shall find

III. That an experience of his mercy will excite our admiration and confirm our faith

Nothing astonishes the soul so much as a discovery of Christ's power and grace

[The people who beheld the miracle, were amazed—And doubtless the person also who received the benefit, was filled with admiration—Thus is the converted soul made a wonder unto many—Many will “glorify God in him”—Nor will *he* wonder less, whose faculties are renewed by grace—How plainly does he now see his former bondage to Satan!—How does he marvel at the rich mercy vouchsafed unto him!—Above all, how does he adore the sovereignty of God who has thus distinguished him from others!—Often does he exclaim, Why me, Lord? why hast thou taken me, while so many others are yet left in a state of nature?—]

Nor does any thing so much confirm our faith in Christ

[The people justly concluded from the miracle that Jesus must be the promised Messiah—And can any one see the effects of his grace, and not admire him in them?—Can any one receive his spiritual benefits, and not acknowledge his sufficiency to save the soul?—When once we can say, He has opened

^s Eph. i. 22.

^h Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

opened my eyes, we can have no doubt of his ability to do for us whatever we need—We shall exultingly appeal to others, Is not this the Christ?—Yea, we shall recommend him to others as a sure refuge, and an almighty friend—]

APPLICATION

1. To those who are yet under the power of Satan

[If we should credit men's account of themselves, none of this description could be found—But are there none whose lives evince this melancholy truth; none, whose powers of speech have been employed only for secular and carnal purposes, and who have been utterly blind to the beauty and excellency of true religion?—Know then, that however great an object of commiseration a man is, who is incapable of seeing to supply his own wants, and of speaking to make them known to others, he is in a far happier state than you—His wants may be supplied, yours cannot; his will end at death, but yours will follow you into the eternal world—Look then to Jesus, and pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes," "Open thou my lips"—Thus shall you become monuments of his mercy, and adore him for his goodness to all eternity—]

2. To those who have been delivered from Satan

[No person restored to the use of speech and sight has so much reason to rejoice as you—Employ then for Jesus the faculties which he has given you—And guard against the devices of Satan—He can again (alas! how often does he!) both blind your eyes, and seal your lips—In Jesus is your strength—Your application to him must be renewed yet daily—In this way you will grow in knowledge and in grace—And you will be progressively fitted to behold his glory and to sing his praises for evermore—]

CCXCII. CHRIST STILLETH THE TEMPEST.

Matt. viii. 27. *But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?*

THE more we see of Christ, the more we are constrained to admire him—

Every fresh miracle discovers to us more of his unbounded power and grace—

The disciples had often been struck with wonder at the miracles wrought by him—

They now beheld a miracle in which they themselves were deeply interested—

And were stimulated by it to more exalted thoughts of his august character—

It will be profitable to enquire

I. What it was at which they so marvelled

The disciples in crossing the lake were overtaken by a storm—

And were in imminent danger of being overwhelmed by the waves—

In this strait they called upon their Lord for help

[They had put to sea in compliance with their Lord's command^a—

Yet were they not exempt from the dangers incident to navigation—

Christ himself submitted to be thus tossed by winds and waves—

And in so doing has taught us what his church must expect in this tempestuous world^b—

His disciples, having exerted themselves in vain, applied to him—

In this they afford us a good example under our distresses—

Perplexed by fear, and agitated by impatience, they addressed him rather in a querulous expostulation^c—

Alas! how feeble is our nature under the pressure of heavy trials!—

How apt are we to mix our supplications with complaints against God^d!—

They shewed however, with all their weakness, in whom their trust was—

And that they had no hope but in his almighty aid—]

He immediately interposed for their deliverance

[He could, if he had seen fit, have prevented the storm—

But then the disciples would not have discovered their own weakness—

Nor have seen this marvellous display of their Master's power—

It is for the same gracious ends that he permits our troubles—

And, when they have brought us to him in fervent supplication, he will deliver us from them—

He arose from his pillow, and with authority rebuked the storm—

Instantly

^a Ver. 18.

^b Acts xiv. 22.

^c Job iii. 23. & vi. 4. & vii. 20.

^d 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

Instantly the boisterous winds were hushed, and the roaring billows silenced—

Though at other times the waters after a storm remained in a perturbed state, at his command they subsided to a perfect calm—

Such is the effect his word produces on “the tempest-tossed soul”—

Terrors, that appalled the conscience, are dissipated as a cloud^e—

Temptations, that agitated the frame, are disarmed of their power^f—

And afflictions, that overwhelmed the soul, are made to yield “the *peaceable fruits* of righteousness”—

Well might they marvel on an occasion like this—

Nothing seems so much beyond the control of man as the winds and waves—

But even these heard the voice and obeyed the will of the Lord Jesus—

Well therefore might the disciples exclaim, “What manner of man is this!”—]

So stupendous a miracle should lead us to consider

II. What views of Christ will naturally arise from this display of his power

The disciples, through their ignorance and perplexity, scarcely knew what to think—

But to *us* his conduct naturally suggests the following truths

1. Christ is the true and living God

[His sleeping, through fatigue, shewed him to be a man like ourselves—

But his exercise of such power proved him to be God also—

Moses had opened the sea by his wonder-working rod—

And Elijah had made a path through Jordan by his mantle—

But both confessedly wrought their miracles in dependence on God—

Jesus, on the contrary, performed this miracle by his own power—

And who, but God, is sufficient for such things?—

It is spoken of as the peculiar prerogative of God to rule the sea^g—

Let us then bear this in mind in all our addresses unto Jesus—

Let us indeed make this *the ground* of our application to him^h—]

2. He

^e Acts xvi. 29—34.

^g Prov. xxx. 4. Ps. lxxv. 7.

^f 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^h Isai. xlv. 22.

2. He is never unmindful of his people's troubles, however he may appear to be so

[The apostles rather reflected on him as though he "cared not" for them—

But his providential care was not the less exerted because he was asleep—

We also are ready on some occasions to think him unmindful of us—

We too often adopt the impatient language of the church of oldⁱ—

But the answer he gave to them, is equally applicable to us^k—

We never need to be afraid if we be embarked with him—

His ark may be tossed about and driven by tempestuous winds—

But though every thing else should perish, *that* will outride the storm—]

3. He will not withhold his aid on account of the weakness of our faith

[The excessive fears of his disciples shewed their want of faith—

He therefore reproved them for having so little confidence in him—

But he would not on that account refuse their request—

In us also he too often sees the workings of unbelief—

But he will "not be extreme to mark what is done amiss"—

He frequently when on earth relieved those who doubted his power or his willingness to help them^l—

And it is well for us that he still exercises the same pity and forbearance—

Doubtless, however, the stronger our faith, the more speedy and effectual, for the most part, will our deliverances be—]

4. He is as able to save us out of the greatest difficulties as from the least

[We are ever prone to limit him [the exercise of his goodness—

Nor are even the most signal manifestations of his power sufficient to correct this propensity^m—

But he who created and upholds all things can overrule them as he pleases—

And his promises to his people are fully commensurate with their wants—

Let us then go to him under our most pressing difficulties—

And

ⁱ Is. i. xlix. 14.

^k Ib. ver. 15, 16.

^l Matt. viii. 2. Mark ix. 22.

^m Ps. lxxxviii. 19, 20.

And rest assured, that he is both able and willing to save us to the uttermostⁿ—]

ADDRESS

1. To the disobedient

[God has been pleased to bestow on man the gift of reason—

And to leave him a free agent in all which he does—

Alas! how vilely do the generality abuse this transcendent mercy!—

They are more regardless of the divine command than even winds and waves—

And is this the end for which God has so distinguished us?—

Is the privilege of volition granted us to encourage our revolt?—

Is it not rather, that our obedience to God may be a rational service?—

Let the disobedient stand amazed at their impiety—

Let them wonder that the divine forbearance is so long exercised towards them—

Surely they have abundant need to offer that petition^o—

O that they may be more impressed with their danger than ever the disciples were!—]

2. To those who truly endeavour to serve the Lord Christ

[All seasons are not alike in the spiritual, any more than in the natural world—

The greatest difficulties may encompass you, when you have the clearest evidence that you are in the way of duty—

But know that your Lord is an all-sufficient, ever-present help—

Do not then shun the path of duty because of any trial that may beset you—

In the midst of all, possess your souls in faith and patience—

And let the triumphant words of former saints be your song^p—

Thus shall you have richer discoveries of your Saviour's care and love—

And from personal experience attest the truth of that poetical description^q—]

ⁿ Heb. vii. 25.

^p Ps. xlv. 1, 2, 3, 5.

^o Ver. 25.

^q Ps. cvii. 23—30.

CCXCIII. THE GADARENE DÆMONIAC.

Mark v. 16—18. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine. And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts. And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil, prayed him that he might be with him.*

MANY of our Lord's miracles have been cavilled at by infidels—

This has afforded much scope for their profane objections—

Our modern Sadducees suppose the man to have been only cured of an epilepsy—

But there is abundant proof in the parable that he was really possessed—

And that the swine were driven into the sea, not by two diseased men, but by the devils themselves^a—

The healing of the dæmoniac, the destruction of the swine, and the different conduct of the dæmoniac and Gadarenes on that occasion, are all adverted to in the text—

They may be illustrated by, and will reflect light upon, the following observations

I. Satan is a malicious and powerful enemy to man

Satan had formerly more power than now over the bodies of men—

And dreadful was the tyranny he exercised over this poor Gadarene

[There were two dæmoniacs; but one is noticed as the more remarkable^b—

Satan drove him from the converse and society of men—

Satan enabled him to break the chains and fetters with which he was bound—

Satan made him a source of terror to others, and of misery to himself—]

His power over the souls of men is still exerted as much as ever

[His agency is not the less real because it is invisible—

We

^a No two men could drive twenty, much less two thousand, swine into the sea.

^b Matt. viii. 28.

We may discern it, as we do the wind, by its outward effects—

The scripture represents him as leading men captive at his will^e—

He keeps them from all converse with God and his people—

He causes them to break through all the restraints of reason and conscience—

He stimulates them to a conduct injurious to themselves and others—

He is the god of this world, and the promoter of all iniquity^d—]

But, however powerful he is, there is One superior to him

II. Jesus is ever able and ready to control him

The man, who had fiercely assaulted others, approached Jesus with reverence—

And Jesus immediately displayed his power over the unclean spirit

[There were many evil spirits in this unhappy man^e—

But as they acted under one leader, they are spoken of as one—

The spirit was constrained to acknowledge the august character of Jesus^f—

And to deprecate the wrath he had so much reason to expect^g—

Nor could he retain possession of his vassal any longer—

He could not even enter into the swine without our Lord's permission—

Satan asked permission, in order that he might destroy the swine, and thus incense the Gadarenes against our Lord—

Jesus suffered him to do it, in order that the Gadarenes might see how great a deliverance had been wrought for the poor dæmoniac—

Instantly the swine, possessed by the devils, rushed into the sea and perished^h—

But the man delivered from them was restored to his right mindⁱ—

Thus was the divine authority of Jesus undeniably manifest to all—]

The

^e 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 4. Eph. ii. 2.

^c Ver. 9.

^f Ver. 7.

^g Ver. 7. He was afraid lest Jesus should command him to go into the deep, that is, the abyss of hell, where his punishment will at the last day be greatly increased. Compare Luke viii. 31. and Matt. viii. 29.

^h Ver. 13.

ⁱ Ver. 15.

The same power will he still exercise over Satan on our behalf

[He is that stronger person who alone can overcome the strong man^k—

However enslaved we have been, he is able to deliver us—

He that once triumphed over principalities on the cross, will now vanquish them in us^l—

His word has been effectual for the deliverance of thousands^m—

If he suffer “Satan to buffet” us, “his grace shall be sufficient for usⁿ”—

If to “sift us as wheat,” he will keep us that “our faith fail not^o”—

He has given us armour by which the weakest may withstand him^p—

And has promised in due time to bruise him under our feet^q—]

This benevolent act could not fail, one would suppose, of conciliating the esteem of all

III. Though all are greatly indebted to Jesus for restraining Satan, there is a wide difference in the dispositions of different men towards him

The ungrateful Gadarenes solicited his departure from them

[The Jews who owned the swine were justly punished for keeping them—

Yet were well recompensed for the loss of them by the dismissal of the evil spirits—

And should have rejoiced, that so mighty a deliverer was come among them—

Yea, they should have availed themselves of his presence to gain instruction—

But they preferred their temporal to their spiritual interests—

And with one voice intreated him to depart from them—]

Thus do many act at this time when Jesus comes to them in his gospel

[While they acknowledge him to be “the Son of God,” they exclaim, “What have we to do with thee?”—

They cannot endure to have their lusts mortified and slain—

They dread his presence as an occasion of “torment” to them^r—

Were

^k Luke xi. 21, 22.

^l Col. ii. 15.

^m Acts xxvi. 18.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xii. 7, 9.

^o Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^p Eph. vi. 11—13.

^q Rom. xvi. 20.

^r They are averse to hear his word lest it should make them melancholy.

Were it not for the restraints imposed by Jesus, Satan would destroy them utterly as he did the swine—

Yet they love their chains, and hate their deliverer—

They deprecate freedom from sin, as though it were the sorest bondage—

Their language resembles that of the Gadarenes in the text^s—

Not that they speak thus from ignorance or humility, like Peter^t—

The motives, which actuate them, are declared by our Lord himself^u—]

But the dæmoniac had far different thoughts of his benefactor

[He begged to become a stated attendant and follower of Jesus—

When, for wise reasons, his petition was refused, he acquiesced cheerfully in his Lord's will—

He willingly denied himself, that he might benefit his friends, and glorify his Lord—

He gladly proclaimed to all around him what great things Jesus had done for him—

In discharging his duty he feared neither men nor devils—

But lived a conspicuous monument of the power and grace of Christ—]

Every one that has experienced a like deliverance, will resemble him

[A sense of benefits received will animate their souls—

They will “devote themselves as living sacrifices” to their God and Saviour—

To enjoy and glorify him will be their highest ambition—

Yet will they deny themselves many spiritual privileges to promote the welfare of others, or to fulfil their relative duties—

Sure of divine protection, they will shrink at no danger—

They will study only to walk worthy of their Redeemer—

They will rejoice, like David, to commend him to others^x—

And to extend the knowledge of him to all around them—]

APPLICATION

[Let us enquire whether we have been indeed rescued from this “roaring lion?”—

We must not judge by extorted confessions, or occasional prayers—

Satan acknowledged Christ, and deprecated his wrath—

But

^s Compare Job xxi. 14. with the text.

^t John iii. 19, 20.

^u Luke v. 8.

^x Ps. lxvi. 16.

But though "he believed and trembled," he was a devil still—

Thus many pray, "Torment me not," who have no real love to Christ, or desire after spiritual blessings—

Let us seek a better and more certain evidence of our conversion—

Let us obey his commands, however dangerous or self-denying—

Let us devote ourselves to his service, and live to his glory—]

CCXCIV. THE WOMAN WITH A BLOODY FLUX HEALED.

Mark v. 25—29. *A certain woman which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, if I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague.*

THE miracles of our Lord afford much useful instruction—

They were not perhaps always intended as types—

But they afford a just occasion for spiritual observations—

To improve the miracle now before us, we observe

I. Sin has introduced many lamentable evils into the world

[Sickness and pain and death are the effects of sin—

If our first parents had not sinned, these things had never existed—

The infirmities of the weaker sex are especially noticed in this view^a—

Deplorable was the condition of the woman mentioned in the text—

But incomparably worse effects have proceeded from sin—

Our souls are altogether diseased in every part—

The prophet's description of the Jews is applicable to us^b—

Our own confession is but too just a picture of our state^c—

And, if we should die in this state, we must surely perish^d—]

II. We

^a Gen. iii. 16.

^c "There is no health in us."

^b Isai. i. 5, 6.

^d 1 Cor. vi. 9.

II. We are prone to rest in carnal methods of removing them

[The woman had employed many physicians—
And had spent her substance on them without any benefit—
We blame her not for using all possible means of relief—
But she had looked no higher than to the creature for help—

This conduct incensed the Lord against good king Asa^e—
And in every age it provokes the eyes of his glory—
In spiritual things we generally act the same part—
Under slight convictions of sin we rest in purposes of amendment—

If guilt lie heavy on our souls, we flee to duties—
And hope by them to compensate for past neglects^f—
Not but that it is right to use the means of salvation—
But we should look through the means to the Saviour—
And expect mercy, not for our diligence, but for his name's sake^g—

Unless we do this, our labour will end in disappointment—]

III. However desperate our disorders be, the Lord Jesus is able to heal them

[The woman's disease had baffled all the art of medicine—
But she hoped to find relief from the Lord Jesus—
Nor was she disappointed in her application to him—
There went virtue out of him and healed her instantly—
The same power will he exercise over the diseases of the soul—

The most heinous sins may be purged away by his blood—
The most inveterate lusts may be subdued by his Spirit^h—
A whole cloud of witnesses have testified of this truthⁱ—
Nor are there wanting many living monuments of his power and grace.]

IV. The more we honour Jesus by faith, the more will he bless and honour us

[Greatly did this diseased person honour Jesus by her faith—

She had heard of his unbounded power and benevolence towards others—

She trusted that he would exercise them towards herself—
Nor did she at all stagger through unbelief—

Jesus therefore determined to bless and honour her—

His inquiries were made, not for his own information, but to bring her into notice—

And

^e 2 Chron. xvi. 12.

^f Mic. vi. 6, 7.

^g Rom. ix. 31, 32.

^h 1 Cor. vi. 11.

ⁱ Manasseh, David, Solomon, Paul, &c. See 1 Tim. i. 16.

And to propose her as a pattern for the encouragement of others—

He not only conveyed, but expressly confirmed, her cure—

And dismissed her with the endearing appellation of “daughter”—

Thus will he testify his love to all who rely upon him—

How gloriously did he reward the confidence of the Hebrew youths^k!—

Nor shall any put their trust in him in vain—

Their sins, however numerous, shall surely be forgiven^l—

Their difficulties, however great, shall surely be overcome^m—]

ADDRESS

1. To those who are unconcerned about their spiritual maladies

[We all are sensible that we are sinful creatures—

And profess an intention to seek forgiveness—

Yet for the most part we defer this necessary work—

If our bodies were disordered we should apply to the physician—

We should even spend our substance in procuring his aid—

And this, with only an uncertain hope of obtaining relief—

But we account the smallest labour too much for our souls—

We will not apply in earnest to our almighty Physician—

Notwithstanding we could not fail of success in our application—

And should be sure to obtain healing “without money and without price”—

What strange infatuation possesses impenitent sinners!—

What extreme folly is it to prefer the transient welfare of a perishable body, before the eternal welfare of an immortal soul!—

Let the conduct of this woman put such persons to shame—

And let them instantly avail themselves of the Saviour’s presence—]

2. To those who desire to have their disorders healed

[Man is ever prone to seek help in the creature *first*—

The Jews of old did this to their own confusionⁿ—

And God has declared, that all who do so shall fail of success^o—

Let us then be convinced that the sinner’s help is in God alone—

And that all others are “physicians of no value”—

Let

^k Dan. iii. 17, 25, 27.

^l Matt. xii. 31.

^m Mark xi. 22, 23.

ⁿ Hos. v. 13.

^o Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

Let us never question the power or willingness of Christ to save—

Let us *make our way to him through all difficulties and obstructions—*

Let us stretch out our hands with humble boldness and confidence—

Nor doubt but that virtue shall proceed from him to heal our souls—]

CCXCV. JAIRUS' DAUGHTER HEALED.

Luke viii. 50. *When Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not : believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

AFFLICTIONS may well be deprecated by us as painful to flesh and blood—

But they are often the means of humbling us before God—

Multitudes came as suppliants to our Lord, who would never have regarded him if they had not felt the pressure of disease or trouble—

The rich in general were the most backward to acknowledge him—

But they found that in the hour of affliction none other could do them good—

Hence occasionally we see the opulent presenting their supplications before him—

Nor did he reject the suit of any, whether they were rich or poor—

The answer he gave to the ruler of the synagogue is recorded in the text—

And it will naturally lead us to notice the ruler's faith

I. How it was tried

Jairus (such was his name) had much to try his faith

[He had an only child (twelve years of age) in dying circumstances—

Having heard much of our Lord's miracles, he applied to him on behalf of his daughter—

And earnestly requested him to come and restore her to health—

But while he was returning with Jesus to his house, his servant brought tidings that the child was dead—

This was a dreadful shock to the parent's feelings—
And might have utterly destroyed all his hopes—]

Thus it is that the faith of God's people is often tried
[They are enabled to make application to their God and
Saviour—

But the storm in the meantime gathers thick around
them—

Their difficulties so increase, that their hopes seem almost
blasted—

They have cried for pardon, and find only an increasing
sense of guilt—

They have prayed for deliverance from corruption or tempta-
tion, and experienced the assaults of Satan more violent
than ever—

Thus they are almost ready to think that God has cast out
their prayer, and shut up his tender mercies from them—

It was in this manner that holy Job was tried—

Yea, the experience of most, however diversified, is generally
found to agree in this^a—]

But this accumulated trouble was permitted for the
further exercise of the ruler's faith

II. How it operated

He was enabled humbly and confidently to depend on
Jesus

[It was his faith that first led him to Jesus for help—

Nor, when his case seemed desperate, did he give up his
hope—

It is probable that our Lord might perceive some rising
apprehensions in his mind—

But he sustained him instantly with that encouraging word,
"Fear not"—

Jairus expected now that his child should be raised as from
a sleep—

The idea of sleep, however, only called forth the derision of
the mourners—

Such was the fruit of their ignorance and unbelief—

But the ruler himself resembled the father of the faith-
ful^b—]

It is in this way that true faith will ever shew itself

[It will surely lead us to Jesus for relief—

It will make us humble and importunate in our supplica-
tions to him—

We shall not presently turn from him because our difficul-
ties increase—

We

^a Ps. cvii. 5, 6, 12, 13, 18, 19, 26, 27, 28.

^b Rom. iv. 18, 20, 21.

We shall rather adopt the expression of holy Job ^c—

Unbelief may prompt us to deride what we do not understand—

But faith will make us acquiesce in God's declarations, though we cannot fully comprehend them—

And expect the accomplishment of his promises, however his providence may appear to contradict them—]

Jesus did not fail to respect the faith that honoured him

III. How it was rewarded

Jesus answered the ruler to the full extent of all his wishes

[Our Lord reproved the excessive lamentations of the people—

And encouraged them to expect the restoration of the child—

But he would not suffer those who had derided him to be spectators of the miracle—

He took with him, however, persons sufficient to attest it—

He favoured the believing parents with admission to behold it—

And restored their daughter, as it had been from sleep, in their very presence—

The child arose instantly, and walked as in perfect health—

For their further conviction he ordered food to be given to the child—

By this also he intimated, that though she was restored by a miracle, she was to be kept alive by natural means—

What a rich reward was this to the believing suppliant !—]

Nor shall any one who asks in faith, be disappointed

[Our Lord has commanded us to ask in faith ^d—

And has assured us that petitions, so offered, shall be answered by him ^e—

Things the most impossible to man, shall, if they will conduce to our good and to God's honour, be effected by the prayer of faith ^f—

Crimes the most atrocious that ever were committed, shall be pardoned ^g—

Lusts the most inveterate that ever enslaved a soul, shall be subdued ^h—

The dead in trespasses and sins shall be raised, like Christ himself, to a new and heavenly life ⁱ—

Nor shall they fail of attaining eternal happiness in heaven ^k—]

APPLI-

^c Job xiii. 15.

^e Matt. xxi. 22.

^g Acts xiii. 39.

[!] Eph. i. 19, 20. with ii. 5, 6.

^d Mark xi. 24.

^f Mark ix. 23.

^h Isai. lix. 19. 1 Cor. vi. 11.

^k John iii. 15. Isai, xlv. 17.

APPLICATION

[Every man must expect trouble in this vale of tears—

The dearest friends must look forward to a day of separation—

But let every trouble drive us to the compassionate Jesus—

And every want be spread before him in prayer^l—

We are not now indeed to expect *miraculous* interpositions—

Nor ought we to ask for *temporal* blessings in an unqualified manner—

We should commit the concerns of this life to his all-wise disposal—

But for *spiritual* blessings we cannot be too importunate—

Nor can our faith in his word be too strong—

What he said to Martha he still says to us^m—

The advice of Jehosaphat is the best direction we can followⁿ—

Let us not then limit his tender mercies—

If we resemble the Samaritan lord, we shall fare like him^o—

Let us not in renewed troubles be like the unbelieving Jews^p—

But let us bear in mind that encouraging declaration^q—

And determine henceforth to live like the apostle^r—]

^l Phil. iv. 6.

^m John xi. 40.

^p 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^o 2 Kings vii. 2, 17.

^r Ps. lxxviii. 20.

^q Eph. iii. 20.

^r Gal. ii. 20.

CCXCVI. TWO BLIND MEN HEALED.

Matt. ix. 28—30. *And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus said unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith, be it unto you. And their eyes were opened.*

WE are so much accustomed to read and hear the miracles of our Lord, that the recital of them produces little or no effect—But had we seen the multitudes of diseased people continually thronging to him, crying after him, and breaking in upon his retreats when he was in the houses of his friends, we should have been greatly astonished—In the passage before us we have a specimen of their importunity—Two blind men, having
in

in vain supplicated our Lord's assistance in the street, followed him into an house, and there obtained that relief, which, from prudential considerations perhaps, he had not chosen to impart in the presence of the people—

Waving many observations which will arise, when another miracle, exactly similar to this^a, shall be considered, we shall fix our attention upon two things, which are very strongly marked in the words before us ;

I. The object of faith

The whole sacred volume is to be received by us ; but God has revealed in it the proper object of our faith— His perfections are the foundation on which we build ; and though every perfection is equally an object of our *love*, yet there seems a propriety in regarding his *power* as the more immediate object of our *faith* ; because it will be to no purpose to believe him well-disposed towards us, if we do not also believe him *able* to effect his gracious intentions

[In confirmation of this we may observe, that in the most eminent instances of faith, the power of God has been chiefly regarded^b— — —

And in the most remarkable instances of unbelief, his power has been principally doubted^c— — — Moreover God in a peculiar manner points out this attribute to our notice^d, expostulates with us for not attending to it sufficiently^e, and exhorts us to take it for our *strength*^f— — —]

The address of our Lord to the two suppliants leads us further to remark

II. The

^a Matt. xx. 30—34.

^b *Abraham*, whose faith is so highly commended, had respect to the power of God to give him a son in his old age, Rom. iv. 19—21. and to raise him up from the dead, Heb. xi. 19. In dependence on this, *Jonathan* attacked a Philistine garrison, 1 Sam. xiv. 6. *Jehoshaphat* went forth against three confederate armies, 2 Chron. xx. 6, 12. and *the Hebrew youths* withstood the command of the Babylonish monarch, Dan. iii. 17, 18.

^c *Sarah* questioned the power of God to give her a child, Gen. xviii. 12—14. As did also the *Israelites* to give them bread and flesh, Ps. lxxviii. 20. *Moses* himself on one occasion staggered at God's promise, from an apprehension that it could not be performed, Numb. xi. 21, 22. And *Martha* deemed the putrid state of her brother's corpse an insurmountable bar to his restoration to life, John xi. 39, 40.

^d Ps. lxii. 11.

^e Isai. xl. 28, 29.

^f Isai. xxvi. 4.

II. The importance of faith

[Our Lord makes more enquiry after this than after any other grace ^g — — He overlooked many faults, where this was exercised ^h; and disregarded every thing that was apparently good, if this were wanting ⁱ — — He invariably bestowed the highest encomiums upon it ^k; and made it, not only a condition, but the very measure of his favours ^l — —]

APPLICATION

1. To unbelievers

[If men may manifest a very considerable earnestness about salvation, and yet leave room to doubt whether they really believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ, how evidently must *they* be unbelievers, who have no solicitude about their eternal welfare! — Think then, what will you answer to the Lord when he shall enquire respecting your faith? — And what will you do, if he should say, Be it unto you according to your faith? — Alas! you need no greater curse than this — If you have no more pardon, peace, or glory, than in proportion to your present exercise of faith, you will be miserable indeed — O remember the fate of the unbelieving Israelites; and flee to Christ, lest ye perish after their example of unbelief ^m —]

2. To those who are weak in faith

[Can you see the multitude of our Saviour's miracles, and entertain any doubt of his sufficiency? or the examples of so many that were strong in faith, and not be ashamed that, with your superior advantages, you should ever indulge unbelief? — O fix it in your minds, that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost, and to keep that which you have committed to him ⁿ — Believe in the Lord, so shall you be established, believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper ^o — But if ye will not believe, neither shall ye be established ^p —]

3. To believers in general

[You will find that peace of mind, purity of heart,
victory

^g He enquired to this effect of *Martha*, John xi. 26.; of *the blind man*, John ix. 35. See also the text.

^h He might have justly reprov'd the nobleman's impatience, John iv. 49.

ⁱ The zeal and love of Peter were no longer approved when his faith failed him, Matt. xiv. 31. Nor did Jesus regard the ready obedience of his disciples in ferrying him over the lake, when they discovered such timidity and want of faith, Mark iv. 40.

^k Matt. viii. 10. and xxi. 21, 22. See particularly 2 Chron. xvi. 8. where it was not only commended, but rewarded.

^l Mark ix. 23. Matt. viii. 13. and xv. 28. See also the text.

^m Heb. iii. 18, 19. and iv. 11.

ⁿ 2 Tim. i. 12.

^o 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^p Isai. vii. 9.

victory over the world, and indeed all that you hold dear, vary according to the weakness or stability of your faith—Beware then of ever “limiting the Holy One of Israel”—Beg that “what is yet lacking in your faith may be perfected^a”—And seek to become “strong in faith, giving glory to God”—]

§ 1 Thess. iii. 10.

CCXCVII. THE FIVE THOUSAND FED.

Luke ix. 12, 13. *And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place. But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*

WITH our active services for God we should blend devotion and retirement—

And be “careful of our own vineyard, while we are cultivating that of others”—

But there are calls, which may supersede our private duties—

When the occasion is urgent, “God will have mercy rather than sacrifice”—

Our Lord had retired to a desert for the purposes of solitude and prayer—

But, the people still following him, he denied himself these necessary enjoyments—

And renewed his labours with his wonted earnestness—

We shall call your attention to

I. The zeal of the multitude

They followed Jesus when he had withdrawn himself from them

[They had pressed upon him so that he had not had leisure to eat bread^a—

To relieve himself for a season from their importunities, he took ship—

The people, seeing whither he directed his course, ran before him^b—

Unmindful

^a Mark vi. 31.

^b Ib. ver. 33.

Unmindful of their own wants, they followed him to a lonely "desert"—

And, though destitute of "food or lodging," were unwilling to depart from him—]

How far their zeal was pure, may indeed admit of doubt

[Some perhaps were really desirous of divine instruction—

Others sought nothing but the healing of their bodily disorders—

And too many were actuated by no better motive than curiosity—

Thus we learn from their conduct how much may be done by those who, notwithstanding their zeal, are strangers to vital godliness—]

But their conduct condemns the supineness of lukewarm Christians

[It would not indeed be expedient for us to imitate them altogether—

The august character of Jesus, and the paucity of faithful instructors, fully justified *them* in neglecting, for a season, their temporal concerns—

Whereas *we* have many stated opportunities of religious instruction—

And may attend the ordinances without neglecting our worldly callings—

But we should imitate them in their thirst for divine knowledge—

We should, like them, be willing to deny our present ease and interests—

And (in heart and affection) forsake all to follow Christ—

O that the conduct of the generality did not form such a contrast to theirs!—]

Our Lord would not thwart their wishes, or disappoint their hopes

II. The miracles that Jesus wrought for them

He pitied the people because they were as sheep without a shepherd—

He instantly resumed his labour both for their souls and bodies^c—

And provided them a plentiful supply for their present necessities

[To try the faith of Philip, Jesus enquired about purchasing of bread^d—

But

^c Ver. 11.

^d John vi. 5, 6.

But having determined to supply the people by a miracle, he ordered them to be seated in ranks upon the grass—

He took the five loaves and two small fishes which were at hand, and, looking up to heaven, pronounced a blessing upon them—

By this he has taught us to acknowledge God in his bounties, and to adore him for them—

He then brake and delivered the bread to the disciples, that they might distribute it among the multitude—

In the disciples' hands the bread, though constantly imparted, suffered no diminution—

Thus all became spectators and witnesses of the miracle—

All too were filled and satisfied with an ample repast—

How infinitely did the grandeur of this feast surpass that given by king Ahasuerus^e!—

And what an evident demonstration of Jesus' Messiahship did it afford!—]

Nevertheless he would not suffer any thing to be wasted

[He ordered the remnants of the bread and fish to be gathered up—

Of these there were not less than twelve baskets full^f—

This afforded an additional confirmation of the miracle—

By this too he shewed that, not the poor only, but even the most opulent, should exercise frugality—]

From this history we may INFER that,

1. We may safely trust in Jesus for a supply of our wants

[He often suffers his people to be reduced to a state of indigence—

But by this means he discovers to them more fully his care over them—

Nor does he ever fail to fulfil the promise he has made them^g—

We are not indeed in these days to look for miracles—

But he can in ten thousand unforeseen ways supply our wants—

It is he that gives provision to the whole universe—

His almighty power is no less exercised in the production of the fruits of the earth than it was in the miracle before us—

And in the season of our necessity he will interpose for our relief—

Let

^e Esth. i. 4—7.

^f Probably much more than there was at the beginning.

^g Matt. vi. 33.

Let us then, in firm reliance upon him, follow the direction given us^h—]

2. We should be contented with mean and humble fare

[Our Lord occasionally attended at feasts to which he was invited—

Nor is it unlawful for his followers also to be present at them—

But when he feasted ten thousand peopleⁱ, he gave them only the provisions suited to a laborious fisherman^k—

How unseemly then is it for his followers to be men given to appetite!—

Or to squander away their substance in splendid entertainments!—

How does it rather become them to be satisfied with mean provisions!—

And under the greatest straits to adopt the language of St. Paul^l!—]

3. We should be ready at all times to communicate of our substance to others

[The loaves and fishes were all the provision which the apostles had—

Nor is it probable that they had any great store of money to purchase more^m—

Yet all without reluctance complied with their Lord's commandⁿ—

Thus we also are directed to exercise liberality to the poor^o—

And what we do for them, Christ will accept as done for himself^p—]

^k Ps. xxxvii. 3.

ⁱ Matt. xiv. 21.

^k Barley bread, and cold dried fish, with water out of the brook in the desert. John vi. 13.

^l Phil. iv. 16.

^m It should seem that 200 pence, about six guineas, was all the stock that they and their master had at that time to subsist upon, John vi. 7.

ⁿ Ver. 13.

^o Heb. xiii. 16.

^p Matt. xxv. 40.

CCXCVIII. CHRIST WALKING ON THE SEA.

Matt. xiv. 26, 27. *When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit: and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

THE Christian's duties are often difficult and self-denying—Nevertheless he must do the will of God, and leave

leave events to his all-wise disposal—Jesus ordered his disciples to go in a small vessel to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the multitudes, who had been fed by him—They, probably approving in their hearts the proposal that had been made to invest him with royal authority^a, were somewhat averse to leave him; but, being commanded to go, complied^b—In the prosecution of their duty they were overtaken with a storm, which not only obstructed their progress, but threatened their lives—In this state they were greatly terrified; but they soon found that the way of duty was the way of safety—

In elucidating the miraculous interposition of Jesus on their behalf, we shall notice

I. The power he exercised

He came to them walking on the sea

[Jesus, after dismissing the multitudes, retired to a mountain to pray—

And thus by his own example taught us all, and especially ministers, that, however pressing our public business may be, we should redeem time, even from sleep, for the purposes of private devotion—

In the meantime his disciples, driven from their course, were contending with the storm^c—But Jesus went to their relief; and, having no boat or attendants to convey him, walked to them upon the tempestuous waters—]

This he did from the purest and most benevolent motives

[Had he been actuated by a vain ostentation, he would probably have continued walking on the sea, instead of going up into the ship, that the people of Capernaum also might behold him^d—But his disciples were to be his witnesses to the world; and, being very slow of heart to believe, they needed more abundant testimonies for their conviction—Now the walking upon the sea was known to be an indication of divine power^e—

He therefore gave them this evidence *on purpose to prove to them his Messiahship*; and, by means of it, he wrought a conviction on their minds, which his other miracles had failed to produce^f—]

The

^a John vi. 15.

^b Ἠνάγκασεν, ver. 22.

^c They were ordered to go over a small bay to Bethsaida; but striving against the winds which drove them out to sea towards Capernaum, they were, after many hours, only a league from shore.

^d Besides, he had just refused to be made a king.

^e Job ix. 8.

^f Ver. 33. with Mark vi. 52.

The first effect produced by his appearance to them, leads us to notice

II. The fears he occasioned

His disciples were extremely terrified at the sight of him

[The day but just beginning to dawn, their view of him was very indistinct—They supposed him to be a spirit—They knew that it was an evil spirit who had raised the storm by which Job's family were destroyed^z; and they possibly might think that such a spirit had stirred up this tempest, and was now coming to overwhelm them utterly—Filled with terror, they cried aloud; accounting him an object of dread, whom, if they had known him, they would have regarded as their most seasonable, most welcome deliverer—But the trouble was necessary, in order to engage their more fixed attention to the miracle now exhibited before their eyes—]

Thus are the Lord's people frequently harassed by unnecessary fears

[All are called to sustain some conflicts in the path of duty—And in the midst of trouble the mind is apt to faint—If our difficulties or dangers be great, we are prone to indulge despondency, and to increase by imaginary fears the calamities under which we labour—How often has *that* been a source of trouble to us, which should rather have been an occasion of joy and gratitude!—How often have we forgotten, that God is pledged for our support, while we continue in the path of duty—And that there are a thousand unforeseen ways in which he can appear for us, when we think him most unmindful of our state!—But, however distressing our fears may be for a moment, we shall have reason to be thankful for them, if they be the means of impressing us with a more abiding sense of Christ's love and faithfulness—Yea, they are often permitted, and even excited by him, for this very end—]

These fears however were amply compensated by

III. The condescension he manifested

He instantly dispelled their fears in the kindest and most condescending manner

[He at first appeared as though he would pass by them—But, having tried them for a moment, he revealed himself unto them; and bade them dismiss their groundless fears—He moreover went up into the vessel to them—And immediately the ship was wafted to its destined port^h—]

Thus

^z Job i. 12, 19.

^h John vi. 21.

Thus does he at this time also allay the fears of his people

[Are they distressed by reason of fierce opposition? he reminds them that, with him on their side, they have none to fearⁱ—Are they overwhelmed with heavy trials? his presence with them is urged by him as an abundant ground of consolation and encouragement^k—Are they desponding under an apprehension that they are forsaken by him? he gently reproves their unbelief^l, and assures them of his unremitting care^m—Whatever be the source of their discouragement, he bids them not fearⁿ—And commands his ministers to labour more especially in comforting their afflicted minds^o—Thus, by revealing himself to them, he removes their trouble; and, by his presence with them, carries them forward towards the haven of rest—]

INFER

1. There is no state in which Christ *can* not save us

[Our difficulties may be greatly multiplied, and appear utterly unsurmountable—But “his hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear”—He who “made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over,” and *saved* Jonah in the belly of a fish, can never be at a loss for means to deliver us—On the contrary, the greater be the obstacles to our salvation, the more will he magnify his power and grace in effecting it—]

2. There is no state in which Christ *will* not save us

[He sees us when we little think of it; and is often nearer to us than we imagine—Our conflicts may be long; and he may suffer all our endeavours to be frustrated—But he will appear for us in some unexpected way—And his presence with us shall both alleviate our labours, and crown us with success—Only let us invite him into the vessel with us, and we shall gain in safety the desired haven—]

ⁱ Isai. xli. 10—15.

^k Isai. xliii. 1, 2, 5.

^l Isai. xl. 27—31.

^m Isai. xlix. 14, 15.

ⁿ Luke xii. 32.

^o Isai. xxxv. 4.

CCXCIX. PETER SAVED WHEN SINKING IN THE SEA.

Matt. xiv. 30, 31. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

'MEN'S constitutional propensities are apt to betray them into many errors—Whatever be the natural frailties

frailties of any person, they usually form the weak part of his character even to his latest hour—The force of them is no where more strongly exhibited than in the conduct of Peter—He was of a bold, forward, confident disposition—This led him on many occasions to act with indiscretion, and often brought upon him a just reproof—In the passage before us he needlessly solicited a trial of his faith—And the experiment terminated in his shame—The account given of it in the text, leads us to observe

I. We should not needlessly seek trials, nor fear those to which we are called in the way of duty.

[We are very apt to rush into temptation—And to think that we shall be able to endure it—But this is, in fact, to tempt God—It is the very thing to which Satan endeavoured to persuade our Lord—Peter indeed was actuated in part by faith and love—But there was evidently no small degree of ostentation in his request to our Lord—Though he did not venture without a call, yet he presumptuously asked permission to display the grace, which he fancied himself possessed of—And our Lord gave him the permission, in order to shew him his own weakness—Nor can we expect any different issue, if we presumptuously run into temptation—On the other hand, we should not fear, if we be called into trials in the way of duty—If there were the most inveterate enemies close to us, we should not fear—If there were the sea itself before us, we should go forward—“Before Zerubbabel the mountains shall become a plain,” and “the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over”—Wherever duty calls, we should go—And leave the consequences altogether to God—But they who needlessly rush into difficulties, will fail in the hour of trial, as this same Peter did in the hall of judgment—They only who wait for the pillar and the cloud, will be kept from falling—]

II. If we be at any time in trouble we should call upon Jesus for help

[Here Peter did right—Indeed he could do nothing else—A sense of his weakness and danger brought him to his right mind—Thus should we do under every trouble, whether temporal or spiritual^a—Even where our own imprudence has brought us into the trial, we should call upon him for help^b—Jesus is ever nigh at hand to help us—And is able to extricate us from any danger—His almighty hand stretched out, can save us instantly—As the sight of the brazen serpent healed those that were on the verge of death, so an humble petition

^a Ps. cxxx. 1, 2. and xviii. 3—5.

^b See *JOB* i. 12. and ii. 1, 2.

petition to the Saviour will bring us all-sufficient help—His word to all is, “Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me”—]

III. Though he may rebuke our unbelief, yet he will not refuse the aid which we solicit

[Faith is that which most honours God—Hence Jesus always noticed the faith of persons even more than their humility or love^c—On the other hand, unbelief most dishonours him—Other sins pour contempt on the *law*, but unbelief reflects upon the *lawgiver* as destitute of truth, or power, or love—This therefore Jesus notes with peculiar disapprobation—Justly did he reprove it in Peter; as he will also in us—But he will not be extreme to mark it—He reproved it in a distressed parent^d; but granted his request—So he will make us to feel his displeasure; but he will not shut his ear to our cry—If we had all the guilt of the universe, or the most deep-rooted lusts that ever man had, our prayer should prevail for the removal of them—And the soul that once appeared to be sinking to perdition, shall be securely embarked in the same vessel with Jesus—Nor shall it be long ere it be brought in safety to the haven of eternal rest—]

ADDRESS

1. The presumptuous

[Learn from Peter to shun vain confidence, as you do from Lot's wife to avoid a worldly spirit—Be not high-minded, but fear—Yet when the pillar and the cloud move, fear not—Be strong, not in your own conceit, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus—]

2. The doubting

[Unbelief is a sad enemy in the time of trial—It will weaken us, and expose us to great danger—Guard against it, and pray, “Help thou my unbelief”—Be thankful however for the smallest portion of faith—If it be ever so small, it shall remove mountains, and save the soul at last—“Believe in the Lord, so shall ye prosper; believe his prophets, so shall ye be established”—]

3. The confirmed believer

[Labour to unite fear and confidence, caution and boldness—You are as a light in the world; and in the hour of trial many eyes will be upon you—Be strong then in faith, giving glory to God—So shall you be preserved in every danger; and the church be edified by your example—]

^c Matt. viii. 10. and xv. 28. and Luke vii. 50.

^d Mark ix. 23.

CCC. THE DAUGHTER OF THE CANAANITESS DISPOSSESSED.

Matt. xv. 28. *Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

RETIREMENT is necessary for all; especially for those who minister in holy things—But on certain occasions it must be sacrificed to the pressing calls of duty—Jesus had retired to the country near to Tyre and Sidon on purpose that he might enjoy some privacy—But this Canaanitess, having heard of him, went to importune him on behalf of her afflicted daughter—Nor was her intrusion, however unseasonable, displeasing to him—

In discoursing on the relief afforded her, we shall notice

I. The disposition and conduct of this distressed heathen

The commendation which our blessed Lord himself bestowed on her, naturally leads us to a minute investigation of her character—Behold

1. Her love

[She considered her daughter's affliction as her own; and, when imploring relief for her, cried, "Have mercy upon ME"—And knowing that there was One able to help, she sought him out with diligence, and applied to him with importunity—

We too, like her, may be deeply affected with the bodily disorders of our children; and may make application to physicians on their behalf—But, though we know the power of Jesus to heal disorders, and the utter inefficacy of all human means without his blessing, how rarely do we spread our wants before HIM in fervent prayer!—Yea, when we see the *souls* of our relatives possessed by Satan, and are assured that none but Jesus can deliver them, we profess perhaps to pity them, but find no disposition to intercede for them at the throne of grace—Or, if we occasionally put up a petition for them, we shew by the coldness of our prayers how little regard we have for their eternal interests—Alas! that an heathen woman should have so much greater concern for the bodily welfare of her child, than we feel for the souls of those who are most nearly related to us!—]

2. Her humility

[Nothing could express more unfeigned humility than her demeanor did on this occasion—She addressed our Lord in

in terms of most profound respect, and prostrated herself before him with the deepest reverence—And, when he, by insinuation at least, compared her to a dog, she, instead of deeming it an insult, acquiesced in the appellation given her, and, with an ingenuity which nothing but the most unfeigned humility could have dictated, turned into a plea the name which seemed to convey nothing but discouragement; “Truth, Lord, I am a dog; yet as the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master’s table, without being considered as robbing the children, so, if thou grant me this one favour, it need not be any diminution of the mercy which thou hast treasured up for the Jews, in comparison of whom I am worthily esteemed a dog”—

Thus should we also conduct ourselves in all our addresses at the throne of grace; our posture should be humble, our spirit contrite, and our acknowledgements full of self-loathing and self-abhorrence—]

3. Her faith

[This, as being the root of all, our Lord more especially commended—Indeed her faith was exceeding great: she beheld him as “the Lord, the son of David,” the true Messiah—She believed him *able* to effect a cure, when it far surpassed all human power; yea, she believed that he could effect it at a distance, and by a word only—She was no less persuaded of his *willingness* to grant her petition; and therefore she persevered in her request in spite of all her discouragements—And, when our Lord declared that her request was granted, she departed with as full a persuasion that her daughter was delivered from the unclean spirit as if she had seen the change accomplished before her eyes—

What an admirable pattern was she in this respect! It is thus that we also should approach him, not doubting either his ability or willingness to help us; and, when we hear his gracious declarations, we should trust in them with the fullest assurance that they shall be accomplished to us—]

4. Her patience

[When first she besought our Lord, he took no notice of her—When she followed him with her intreaties, insomuch that the disciples, merely to get rid of her, became her advocates, he refused to hear her intercessions, and assigned to them a reason which to them appeared unanswerable—When she still, with increasing humility and fervour, urged her request, she also was repulsed, and that too in terms which might have been interpreted as reproachful and injurious—Now persons in bitter anguish of mind are peculiarly susceptible of neglect, and much more of insult, especially from those

of whom they had entertained an high opinion, and from whom they had expected a very different treatment—But, instead of being irritated, she endured all with the meekest submission^a, and determined to persevere till she should obtain her request—

Thus when answers to prayers are delayed, we should continue urging our petitions, saying, “I will not let thee go except thou bless me^b”—Nor should any thing ever induce us to entertain hard thoughts of God, or to murmur at his dispensations towards us, seeing that we deserve nothing at his hands but shame and contempt—]

While we admire the conduct of this woman, let us also contemplate

II. The behaviour of Jesus towards her

For some time he seemed to act in a manner unworthy of himself

[Towards all others he shewed himself kind and condescending, and ready to administer the relief they solicited—Yea, he frequently almost obtruded himself upon the notice of men, and urged them, as it were, to ask for blessings at his hands—Even to the abandoned of all characters he displayed this readiness to impart mercy^c—But towards this distressed suppliant he seemed destitute of all sympathy, or compassion—He had indeed, reasons abundantly sufficient to justify his conduct: he chose to draw forth the grace that was in her heart, and thereby to reprove the indifference of those who called themselves exclusively the children of God—By the delay too he rendered the benefit more acceptable to the woman, and the woman herself a brighter pattern unto us—

In a similar way, and for similar reasons, he sometimes hides his face from us, and turns, as it were, a deaf ear to our complaints—And, if we listened to the dictates of impatience and unbelief, we should be ready to exclaim, “What profit is there that we should call upon him?”—]

But at last he answered her most sanguine expectations

[He who had appeared so regardless of her cry, at last bare testimony to the greatness of her faith—How cheering must his commendations have been to her disconsolate spirit!—And how has he shewn to us, that there may be great faith even where we suppose there is little, or perhaps none at all; and that when we account no terms too humiliating whereby

^a How different was her conduct, though a heathen, from David's under a far less disappointment! 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22.

^b Gen. xxxii. 26.

^c John iv. 10.

to express our vileness, he approves and even admires the graces that we exercise !

With this *condescension in his manner* of shewing mercy, he manifested the greatest *liberality in the favour* he conferred : he made her own wishes the measure of his gifts—Nor will he shew less kindness to us, if we call upon him with our whole hearts—“What will ye that I should do unto you?” is his address to every one of us : and when we have made known our requests, he will say to each, “Be it unto thee even as thou wilt”—With respect to temporal mercies, he will give or withhold as he foresees will be best for us : but in spiritual things he will do for us not only what we ask, but “exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think”—]

We may LEARN from hence, that

1. There is no respect of persons with God

[No man can say, God will not hear me, because I am not of the number of his elect : for we cannot tell who are, or who are not, the elect of God, any farther than we are enabled to judge by their respective fruits—There is no man of any nation, or any character, who shall not find favour with God, if he seek it earnestly through the Lord Jesus Christ—Let secret things then be left to God ; and let all, whether they account themselves dogs or children, seek a portion of that bread which came down from heaven—So shall their souls be liberated from Satan’s yoke, and experience the saving efficacy of the Redeemer’s word—]

2. Persevering prayer will and must prevail

[Never was there an instance wherein the prayer of faith failed of success—It has opened the windows of heaven^d ; and imposed, if we may so speak, restraints upon the Deity himself^e—If we can only wait patiently upon the Lord, he will soon pluck our feet out of the mire, and “put a new song into our mouths, even a thanksgiving unto our God^f”—Let us then “pray, and not faint”—Let us call upon the Lord, and “give him no rest till he arise” for our help^g—Then shall we assuredly succeed at last, and find, that his answers, however delayed, are vouchsafed in the fittest season, and in the most perfect correspondence with our necessities—]

^d Jam. v. 17, 18.

^f Ps. xl. 1—3.

^e Exod. xxxii. 10, 11, 14.

^g Isai. lxii. 7.

CCCI. THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN HEALED.

Mark vii. 32—35. *And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue. And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man.*

THE astonishing frequency of our Lord's miracles renders them the less noticed—

And we are ready to suppose that, after a few of them have been considered, the rest will afford us nothing new—

But every distinct miracle was attended with some peculiar circumstances—

And ought to excite our admiration as much as if it had been the only one recorded—

To improve that which is now before us, we may consider

I. The manner in which it was wrought

Many instructive lessons may be learned from an attentive survey of our Lord's conduct in every part of his life—

His manner of performing this miracle was peculiarly worthy of notice—It was

Humble

[He “took the man aside from the multitude” that surrounded him—

Not that he was afraid of having his miracles inspected and scrutinized—

The greater part of them were wrought publicly before all—

But on some occasions he sought rather to conceal his works—

He wished not to excite the envy of the priests or the jealousy of the rulers—

He laboured also to avoid all appearance of ostentation—

He would shew us by his example how our acts of beneficence should be performed^a—

And

^a Matt. vi. 3.

And that we should never be actuated by the love of man's applause^b—

Hence he so strictly “charged the people not to divulge” this miracle—

He also “looked up to heaven” in acknowledgement of his Father's concurrence—

Not but that he had in himself all power to do whatsoever he willed^c—

But, as mediator, he bore his commission from his heavenly Father—

And therefore directed the eyes of men to HIM as the fountain of all good—

Thus did he teach us to look up to heaven for aid, even in those things for which we might suppose ourselves to be most sufficient—

And to consult in every thing, not our own glory, but the glory of God—]

Compassionate

[Touched with pity toward the object before him, “he sighed”—

He could not view even the present miseries introduced by sin, without deep commiseration—

Thus he shewed how fit he was to be our great high priest^d—

And how *we* ought to feel for others, and to bear their burthens^e—

We should never behold the bodily infirmities of others without longing to relieve them—

Nor, without gratitude to God for the continued use of our own faculties—]

Sovereign

[Though he looked up to heaven, he wrought the miracle by his own power—

He had only to issue the command, Be opened—

He who once said, Let there be light, and there was light, needed only to express his will in order to be obeyed—

Instantly the man received the perfect use of his faculties—

And, though enjoined silence, became an active instrument of spreading his Benefactor's praise—]

Mysterious

[Our Lord was pleased to put his finger into the man's ears, and to touch his tongue with his finger, which he had previously moistened with his own spittle—

What was the precise intention of these means we cannot determine—

Certain

^b John v. 44.

^d Heb. iv. 15.

^c John v. 21.

^e Gal. vi. 2.

Certain it is that they had no necessary connexion with the restoration of the man's faculties—

But they are not without their use as they respect *us*—

They shew that there are no means, how weak soever in themselves, and inadequate to the end proposed, which he may not make use of for his own glory—

And that it becomes us to submit to any means whereby he may be pleased to convey his benefits—]

But, besides more minute considerations, there are others which arise from a more general view of the miracle

II. The improvement we should make of it

All the miracles were intended to confirm the doctrine delivered by our Lord—

We may very properly therefore consider this as

1. A proof of his mission

[It had long been foretold that the Messiah should work miracles—

The restoring of men to the use of their faculties was among the number of the works which were to be performed by him^f—

Here then the prophecy received a *literal* accomplishment—

Nor could prejudice itself find any just reason for questioning any longer our Lord's Messiahship—

We indeed enjoy such abundant light and evidence that we need not the support of any single miracle—

But, as all the miracles collectively, so should each individually, assure us beyond a doubt, that Jesus is the Christ—]

2. A specimen of his work

[Jesus had a much greater work than that of healing bodily disorders—

He is the great physician whose office it is to heal men's souls—

The miracles which he wrought in the days of his flesh were only as shadows of those which he had undertaken to perform—

He unstops the ears of men so that they may "hear his voice and live"—

He loosens their tongues so that they may shew forth his praise—

This he does by the invisible but effectual energy of his spirit—

Let those, who have never yet heard his voice, implore his aid—

Let those, who are yet unoccupied with his praises, intreat his favour—

Soon

^f Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

Soon shall all natural or acquired infirmities yield to his word^g—

And “Ephphatha” be the commencement of a new and heavenly life—]

3. An encouragement for all to call upon him

[The object of his compassion had nothing to recommend him—

His desire of relief was sufficient to call forth the pity of our Lord—

Who then should stay from our Lord on account of his unworthiness?—

Should we make our infirmities a reason for continuing far from him?—

Should we not rather take occasion from them to plead with him more earnestly?—

And would not he rejoice in manifesting his power and love towards us?—

Let every one then apply to him in humility and faith—

No disorders, however complicated, shall be able to withstand his will—

The believing suppliant shall soon experience the efficacy of his grace—

And shall have occasion to add his testimony to theirs of old^h—]

^g Isai. xxxii. 3, 4.

^h Ver. 37.

CCCII. GREAT MULTITUDES HEALED.

Matt. xv. 30, 31. *And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

EVERY miracle which our Lord performed suggests to us some peculiar subjects of profitable meditation— But we shall not now dwell upon any one act, however great or benevolent; our attention at this time will be fixed upon a more than ordinary exertion of omnipotence, the working of miracles *in a mass*, if we may so speak—We behold Jesus healing great multitudes of persons

persons who laboured under a variety of disorders; which circumstance may very properly lead us to enquire

I. What sensations must this exercise of divine power have excited?

A more interesting spectacle cannot be conceived than that which was exhibited on this occasion—Consider the impression that must have been made

1. On the persons healed

[It could not fail but that the persons, who had been healed instantly, and without any painful operation, must be deeply affected with the mercy bestowed on them—With what fixedness of attention must the *blind*, whose eyes had been opened, survey their benefactor!—They would feel no disposition to gratify their curiosity by gazing on the wonders of creation: neither the meridian sun, nor the face of nature enlightened by it, would for one moment attract their notice—The restorer of their visual powers would engross their whole minds; nor would they turn their eyes from him for a moment, unless to wipe away the tears of gratitude and joy that would stream as from an overflowing fountain—With what exquisite delight would the *deaf* listen to the voice of him, who had unstopped their ears! with what insatiable avidity would they drink in the sound, while, with the teachableness of little children, they received his gracious instructions!—As for the *dumb*, whose tongues were loosened, they would, by an involuntary and irresistible impulse, fill the air with acclamations and hosannas, unless that the dread of interrupting the discourses of their Lord should awe them into silence—The *lame* and *maimed* (many of whom perhaps had not only their strength renewed, but their limbs, that had suffered amputation^a, perfectly restored) how would *they* exult and leap for joy, clapping their hands in ecstasy, and glorifying the author of their mercies!—We may be assured of this from what is recorded of the cripple whom Peter healed^b—Methinks the assembly would be like a choir of ten thousand instruments, whose notes were exceeding various, but all in perfect harmony—]

2. On the surrounding multitude

[The spectators, many of whom were friends and relatives of those that had been healed, doubtless participated in the general joy—Their feelings however were probably less ecstatic, because their own personal interest was not so nearly concerned—But their astonishment at the wonders performed, their satisfaction in the success of their own labours, and

^a This may be implied in the word *καλλῆς*. See Mark ix. 43.

^b Acts iii. 8.

and their sympathy with those whose maladies had been removed, could not fail of exciting in their minds the most pleasing sensations—When the wife or husband, the parent or child, saw the object of his warmest affections restored to health, and exercising with activity and vigour the faculties that had been renewed, surely he would lift up his eyes to heaven with devoutest gratitude, or prostrate himself upon the ground in profoundest adoration—When, in addition to the mercy his relatives had received, he beheld others in like circumstances with himself, and every moment fresh monuments of mercy rising before his eyes, we may conceive him overwhelmed with the sight, and lost in amazement—]

3. On Jesus himself

[Could Jesus be an unconcerned spectator of the bliss he was diffusing? Could he, who wept at the grave of Lazarus, refuse to sympathize with this adoring multitude?—It was one of his most common sayings, that it is more blessed to give than to receive^e; and doubtless he experienced the truth of it on this occasion—Let us then consider the joy excited in the breast of every individual that had been relieved; let us consolidate and compress it, as it were, into one mass; and then we may have some faint conception of what Jesus felt, while he was communicating such abundant happiness—He would not fail to adore, with inexpressible, though perhaps hidden, ardour, his heavenly Father, for making him the channel of so many blessings—But Jesus' happiness would be widely different from that of those whom he relieved—*His* would be tempered with pity for their spiritual maladies, of which, alas! they had but little sense; and his praises would be mixed with prayers, that they might flock around him to obtain those richer benefits, of which their present cures were but imperfect emblems—]

Not to indulge mere useless speculations on this exercise of divine power, let us enquire

II. What reflections should it suggest to our minds?

If every separate miracle be replete with instruction to us, much more may this accumulation of miracles afford us matter of useful improvement—

1. Have not *we* need of healing from the hands of Jesus?

[It may be that our *bodies* are preserved in the unimpaired use of all their faculties—But are not our *souls* diseased?—Have we no intellectual blindness from which we need deliverance?—Do not our tongues need to be loosened, our
ears

^e Acts xx. 35.

ears to be unstopped, or our limbs to be invigorated, for the daily performance of our spiritual duties?—Surely, if we will examine our hearts, we shall find that the people who thronged to our Lord were not in a more pitiable condition than ourselves; yea, we are incomparably more miserable than they, because the consequences of our disorders are so much more awful, and our desire for the removal of them is so weak and faint—Let us seek a deep conviction of this truth—Let us, under a sense of our extreme wretchedness, apply to Jesus, and interest our friends and relatives in our behalf—Thus shall the predictions that were *literally* fulfilled by the miracles before us, receive their true, though mystical, accomplishment in the renovation of our souls^d—]

2. Let us not then limit the power and grace of Christ

[The hand which, so easily and with such compassion, dispensed the blessings of health and strength, can surely with the same facility administer to our wants—Our lusts are so inveterate and our habits so deeply rooted, as to destroy the remotest hope of ever rescuing ourselves from their dominion—But the power and compassion of Jesus are the same as ever—The lapse of seventeen hundred years has made no change in him—“ His hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor is his ear heavy that it cannot hear”—Let us then guard against every unworthy, unbelieving thought—Let us be persuaded that he is “ able to save us to the very uttermost;” and that “ he will cast out none who come unto him”—]

3. Let us glorify God *with* and *for* all the faculties we possess

[Our bodily and mental powers are rich mercies from the hand of God, and should be exerted continually in promoting his glory—But, if our eyes have been opened to behold the light of his truth; if our ears have been unstopped, so that we can hear the voice of the good shepherd; if our tongues have been loosed to speak of his name; and if our feet have been strengthened to run the way of his commandments; it becomes us to imitate the multitudes who surrounded him on this occasion—There should not be a cold heart, or an inactive member, throughout this whole assembly—We should all either be filled with admiration of his goodness, or, with ecstatic ardour, render him the tribute of incessant praise—Were we thus occupied, we should enjoy a very heaven upon earth—We cannot conceive a better idea of heaven than if we set before our eyes this adoring multitude—Do we see Jesus encircled by them, every eye fixed on HIM, every tongue sounding HIS praises, every soul ascribing all its happiness to HIS power

^d Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.

power and grace? What is this but heaven?—Let us then resemble them, or rather far outstrip them, in our acclamations, forasmuch as our mercies infinitely exceed those which were enjoyed by them—This will be an improvement as beneficial to ourselves as it will be instructive to others, and honourable to “the God of Israel”—]

CCCIII. THE BLIND MAN HEALED.

Mark viii. 23—25. *And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men, as trees, walking. After that, he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*

THIS miracle has many circumstances common to others—On other occasions our Lord manifested similar condescension and compassion—On other occasions also he both shewed his abhorrence of ostentation, and his displeasure at the obstinate unbelief of men, by performing his miracles in private, and forbidding the persons who were cured, to make them known—But the gradual manner in which he effected this cure is peculiar to this single miracle—We shall therefore fix our attention more particularly on that—And deduce from it some profitable observations

I. Persons may be under the hand of Christ, and yet have but very imperfect views of spiritual things

[This man had experienced somewhat of the power and grace of Christ—Yet he could not distinguish men from trees, except by their motion—Thus are many, of whom there is reason to hope well, extremely dark and indistinct in their views—They know very little of their own depravity, or of Christ’s excellency, or of the nature of the spiritual warfare—Thus the apostles themselves saw not the necessity of Christ’s death^a, or the spiritual nature of his kingdom^b—Even after Christ’s resurrection they could not conceive for what ends he was risen^c—Nor, for several years after the day of Pentecost, did they understand their entire freedom from the Mosaic law, or the purpose of God to make the Gentiles partakers of his

^a Matt. xvi. 22.

^b Luke ix. 54.

^c Acts i. 6.

his salvation ^d—We may well expect therefore to find some amongst ourselves, who, notwithstanding they are dear to Christ, still have “the vail in some measure upon their heart”—]

Nor should this at all appear strange unto us—For

II. Though our Lord could heal our blindness in an instant, yet he chooses rather to do it by the repeated use of the same means

[Our Lord, if it had pleased him, could have healed the man without touching him at all—Or have cured him instantly by the first touch—He needed not, like Elisha, to repeat the use of the same means because he had not power in himself to render the first use of them effectual^e—But he saw fit to repeat the imposition of his hand in order to exercise the faith and patience of the blind man—Thus could he instantaneously enlighten our minds—He who commanded light to shine out of darkness, could with the same ease shine into our hearts with meridian splendor^f—But this is not his usual mode of proceeding in any part of his works—He perfected not the creation but in six successive days of labour—The vegetable, the animal, and the rational creation rise to maturity by degrees—Thus in the new creation of the soul he gradually informs and renews it—He makes use of his preached gospel to open the eyes of the blind—Inadequate as these means are (even as the mere touch of a finger) he has appointed them for this end—He orders also the means to be continually used, as long as there remains the smallest imperfection in our sight—And he is pleased to render them conducive to the end proposed—He “leads us gradually into all truth^g”—And enables us at last to comprehend the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of his unsearchable love^h—]

However imperfect his work in us now is, it must afford us consolation to consider

III. Wherever he has begun the good work, there is reason to hope that he will carry it on to perfection

[Never did our Lord leave one of his miracles imperfectly wrought—In the instance before us he presently perfected the cure

^d Peter needed repeated visions to overcome his prejudices; nor did any thing but a conviction of God's particular interposition prevent the whole college of apostles from censuring Peter for preaching to Cornelius and his friends: Acts x. 28. and Acts xi. 17, 18.

^e 2 Kings iv. 33—35.

^f 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g John xvi. 13.

^h Eph. iii. 18, 19.

cure he had begun—Thus may we hope he will do with respect to the illumination of our minds—If indeed, like Balaam, we be *only* illuminated, and not really sanctified by the truth, we may justly expect to perish with a more aggravated condemnation^l—But if we walk according to the light we have, that light shall surely be increased, and all saving blessings be communicated with it^k—Hence the Christian's path is compared to the sun rising to its meridian height^l—We have none of us reason to doubt, but that Christ will thus perfect that which concerneth us—He has promised to do so^m—On this ground St. Paul expresses his confidence, that he will complete the good work wherever he has begun itⁿ—We too may be confident, provided our faith be tempered with an holy fear^o—We may well argue, with Manoah's wife, that he would not have revealed such things unto us, if he had intended to destroy us^p—We may regard his smaller gifts as an earnest and pledge of greater—And may be assured, that he who has been the author of our faith will also be the finisher of it^q—]

This miracle may be further IMPROVED in a way of

1. Examination

[Our Lord, after the first imposition of his hand, asked the man, “if he saw aught”—Let us put the same question to our own consciences—What do we see which flesh and blood could not reveal unto us^r?—What do we know of the extreme depravity of our nature?—What do we see of the power and grace of Christ?—What do we comprehend of his unsearchable love?—Can we say, like that other blind man, This I know, that whereas I was blind, I now see^s?—If we have no evidence of this change, we are yet in darkness and the shadow of death—Nor, if our light be not increasing, should we be satisfied with our state—It is a shame to us if “we need to be taught again the first principles of the oracles of God, when we ought rather to be teachers of others”—We should go on unto perfection^t—]

2. Consolation

[Many are discouraged because their views of divine truth are dim—They are ready to doubt whether they have ever been taught of God at all—But the Lord has, doubtless, gracious ends in his dealings towards them—Nor does he despise the day of small things^u—He noticed with approbation the smallest beginnings of good in the heart of young Abijah—

^l Numb. xxiv. 3, 4. Heb. vi. 4—6.

¹ Prov. iv. 18.

² Phil. i. 6.

³ Judg. xiii. 23.

⁴ Matt. xvi. 17.

⁵ Heb. v. 11, 12. and vi. 1.

^k 1 John i. 7.

^m Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

ⁿ Rom. xi. 20.

^o Heb. xii. 2.

^p John ix. 25.

^q Zech. iv. 10.

Abijah ^x—And if we endeavour to improve the light he has given us, he will assuredly approve of us also—Are we but lambs? he will carry us in his bosom—Are we but babes? he will feed us with milk ^y—He will bring us to his temple and give us more enlarged discoveries of divine truth as we are able to bear them ^z—Nor let us think that we use the means in vain, though we seem not immediately to reap all the benefit we could wish—When the day of his power is come, we shall find that we have not waited in vain—Jericho was encompassed many times apparently in vain—But at the appointed sound of the rams' horns, the walls fell ^a—So, in God's good time shall the scales fall from our eyes ^b—Let us be thankful then if the day begin to dawn in our hearts ^c—And let us seek to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ^d—]

^x 1 Kings xiv. 13.

^z Ezek. viii. 6, 9, 13, 15.

^b Acts ix. 9, 18.

^y Isai. xl. 11. 1 Cor. iii. 2.

^a Josh. vi. 14, 15, 16, 20.

^c 2 Pet. i. 19.

^d 2 Pet. iii. 18.

CCCIV. THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST.

Luke ix. 29—32. *And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter, and they that were with him, were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men who stood with him.*

THEY, who were the immediate followers of our Lord, beheld him, for the most part, “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”—But, lest they should “be offended in him,” and be tempted to forsake him, he sometimes spake to them of “that glory which he had with the Father before the world was,” and which he should resume as soon as ever the scenes of his present humiliation should be closed—On one occasion he condescended to give to three of them an ocular demonstration of his glory—The particulars are related in the passage before us; in opening which we shall consider

I. The time and manner of his transfiguration

Our Lord was at this time engaged in prayer

[God

[God has on many occasions signally manifested his regard to prayer—It was at the beginning of Daniel's supplications that an angel was sent to reveal to him the period fixed for the Messiah's advent^a—The reason that God assigned for sending Ananias to open the eyes of Saul was, "Behold he prayeth^b"—Thus Jesus was at this time engaged in prayer—He had retired to a mountain for that very purpose: and this was the season which God chose for distinguishing him in this most signal manner—It is worthy of remark, that every time that God was pleased to bear testimony to his Son by an audible voice from heaven, it was either in, or immediately after, prayer^c—And if we cultivated more holy intimacy with God, he would more frequently vouchsafe to us also the special tokens of his love—]

"While he was praying," his form was visibly and wonderfully changed

[In his transfiguration, as it is called, the Godhead displayed itself through the veil of his human nature: his countenance shone like the meridian sun; and his very garments were so irradiated by the lustre of the indwelling Deity, that they were white and dazzling like the light, yea, "so white as no fuller on earth could whiten them^d"—He had hitherto appeared only "in the form of a servant;" but now he appeared in his own proper form as God; at least, so far as his divine nature could be rendered visible to mortal eyes—Nor was this transfiguration intended as a mere ostentatious display of his glory: it was necessary perhaps for his support as man; that, when he should come into the scenes of his deepest humiliation, he might not faint—It was also well calculated to prepare his disciples for that awful view of him, which they were afterwards to have, when they should see him in the garden, prostrate on the ground, bathed in a bloody sweat, and supplicating "with strong crying and tears" the removal of the cup which his Father had put into his hand—]

The history further informs us respecting

II. His conversation with his attendants

Moses and Elijah were sent from heaven to attend upon him

[The body of Moses probably had been preserved, as that of Elijah had been translated to heaven, without suffering the total change which is usually effected by death—They were on this occasion arrayed "in glory," somewhat like to their divine Master, though, of course, they were but as twinkling

^a Dan. ix. 20—23.

^b Acts ix. 11.

^c Luke iii. 21, 22. and John vii. 23.

^d Mark ix. 3.

twinkling stars in comparison of the meridian sun—And there was a peculiar propriety that these should be selected to wait upon him, not only because they had been faithful and highly honoured servants of God, the one being the giver and the other the restorer of the law, but because they fitly represented the law and the prophets; and, in bearing testimony to him, resigned, as it were, their authority into his hands—]

These conversed with him respecting his own approaching death

[One might have expected that they should have talked of heaven: but they had a subject in which all were yet more deeply interested; a subject, in which the inexhaustible treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge are contained; a subject, which fills all heaven with wonder, and which eternity itself will not be sufficient to unfold—Yes, that subject, universally exploded from the societies of men, was the one which occupied their attention during this delightful interview; “they spake of his decease which he should accomplish in Jerusalem”—O what do we lose by lending ourselves so entirely to other topics, and so totally discarding this!—And how infatuated are men, that, even in the society of their dearest friends, they do not improve their hours by conversing on a subject of such universal importance!—]

Nor were his earthly followers wholly excluded—We read of

III. The peculiar privilege granted to some of his disciples

Some more distinguished favourites were admitted to this heavenly vision

[Christ has sanctified human friendships by manifesting the same attachments as are common among men. He not only chose twelve out of the body of his disciples to be his stated followers, but admitted three of them to more peculiar intimacy than the rest: and even of these three there was one, who lay, as it were, in his bosom, and was called, by way of eminence, “The disciple whom he loved”—But the three, who had been taken up to the mountain to spend their time in prayer, had fallen asleep, and lost thereby much of the vision, which they might have seen, and of the conversation, which they might have heard—Alas! What an irreparable loss did they sustain! Well might Jesus have said to them, “Sleep on now and take your rest”—But the effulgence of his glory roused them at last, and they both beheld this bright assemblage of persons, and heard the sublime discourse which passed between them—Happy were their eyes which saw, and their ears which heard such things!—Can we wonder that Peter should

should exclaim, It is good for us to be here; and that he should propose to erect tents for the accommodation of Christ and his heavenly guests, regardless of his own ease, if he might but protract his present enjoyments?—But though well meant, it was an ignorant proposal; for it was needful both for themselves and for the world, that they should speedily resume their wonted labours, and fulfil the work assigned them—Peter however may well be excused, for “he knew not what he said”—]

They also heard the testimony, which the Father on that occasion bore to Christ

[While the apostles were wishing to rest in their present comforts, they were overshadowed with a cloud, and their joys were turned into fear and dread—The cloud perhaps was like that, which guided the Israelites through the wilderness as a symbol of the divine presence: and what can we expect, but that, as sinners, they should tremble at the near approach of the divine Majesty?—But the testimony which they heard, amply compensated their transient fears: their divine Master was proclaimed as the only beloved Son of God; and they were bidden to “hear *him*,” him chiefly, him constantly, him exclusively—Such was the singular honour conferred on him: and though they were forbidden to mention it for a season, lest it should provoke their enemies to wrath, and their fellow-disciples to jealousy, yet doubtless it tended much to support them in their subsequent conflicts—]

INFER

1. How indisputable is the truth of our holy religion!

[This was a most remarkable testimony to the character of Jesus; and it was given by God himself: and would God interpose in this manner in order to deceive? or could those disciples be mistaken in what they so plainly saw with their eyes, and heard with their ears?—Surely, strange as the tidings of the gospel may be thought, here is evidence enough that it is “not a cunningly devised fable”—It is remarkable that St. Peter selects this very event out of the many thousands to which he was a witness, in order to establish beyond a doubt the truth of that doctrine which he preached—Let us then receive that gospel which is so well authenticated, so firmly established—Let us “hear Jesus,” our divinely appointed teacher, and make him “our beloved” Saviour, “in whom our souls are well pleased”—]

2. How diversified are the states of God’s people upon earth!

[These highly favoured disciples were now upon the
mount;

* 2 Pet. i. 16—18.

mount; but they were soon to descend into the valley again, and to go "through much tribulation in their way to the kingdom"—Thus it is with all the Lord's people; the present is at best a chequered scene; nor is trouble ever nearer to us than when we are saying, "My mountain standeth strong; I shall never be moved"^f—Let us then be thankful for any seasons of joy; but never be so elated by them as to wish to set up tabernacles here, or to forget that we may soon experience a sad reverse: yea, let us rather improve our joys as means of strengthening us for future conflicts—]

3. What a glorious place must heaven be!

[It must have been inexpressibly delightful to have beheld, though for so short a time, this heavenly vision: but what must it be to "see Jesus as he is," in all the full blaze of divine majesty; to see him, not attended with two only, but with ten thousands of his saints; and to hear, not a conversation about future sufferings, but songs of everlasting joy and triumph? What must it be to see and hear such things; ourselves resembling the Lord Jesus; our "bodies fashioned like unto his glorious body," and our souls "shining above the sun in the firmament;" our body no longer to become torpid through sloth, nor our soul to be agitated by surprise or terror; but in the perfect exercise of all our faculties to participate that glory, with a full assurance that it shall never end? Well may we *then* say, It is good for us to be here—Then we shall need no tabernacles, for "we shall dwell in the temple of our God, and shall go no more out"^g—May we all be counted worthy of that honour! may we be admitted to the enjoyment of that beatific vision; that "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, we also may appear with him in glory!"—]

^f Ps. xxx. 6, 7.

^g Rev. iii. 12.

CCCV. A DEAF AND DUMB SPIRIT CAST OUT.

Mark ix. 25—27. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, Come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried and rent him sore, and came out of him; and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

VARIOUS, and extremely opposite, were the states, which our Lord, in the course of his ministry, experienced—

He was not wholly a stranger to seasons of exalted joy—

But he was chiefly conversant with scenes of sorrow and affliction—

He had just come down from the mount on which he had been transfigured—

And the splendor of his glory was yet visible in his countenance^a—

But he descended only to behold the miseries to which sin had reduced us—

And to renew his labours among a scoffing and unbelieving people—

To bring into view the various circumstances of the history before us, we shall consider

I. The wretched state of the youth who was brought to him

Imagination can scarcely point out a more distressing scene than that exhibited in the context

[Here was a youth afflicted with an epilepsy, or falling-sickness^b—

This affliction was greatly increased by his being a lunatic^c—

To complete his misery, he was possessed by an evil spirit^d—

This evil spirit took advantage of his natural infirmities—

And impelled him, on the returns of his disorder, to rush into the fire, or into the water^e—

He moreover tare and rent the youth with most excruciating agonies^f—

And deprived him of the powers of speech and hearing^g—

Thus had Satan tormented him even from his very childhood^h—

So that, in the very bloom of life, the youth pined and languished in the extremest miseryⁱ—]

This scene too justly describes the invisible influence of Satan over the souls of men

[We

^a This is not absolutely asserted by the Evangelist: but it is the most probable reason for the "great amazement" which the people discovered at the sight of him, ver. 15. This idea is confirmed by the account given us of Moses the Jewish lawgiver, who experienced a similar continuance of glory on his countenance after conversing with God on mount Sinai, Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. with 2 Cor. iii. 7.

^b Matt. xvii. 15.

^c Ib.

^d Luke ix. 39.

^e Mark ix. 22.

^f Mark ix. 18.

^g Ib. ver. 25.

^h Ib. ver. 21.

ⁱ Ib. ver. 18.

[We have reason to rejoice that his power over men's bodies is now greatly contracted, if not wholly destroyed—

What a miserable world would this be, if the malice of that fiend were not restrained!—

But his power over the souls of men is as extensive as ever^k—

He still takes advantage of our constitutional propensities^l—

And impels us to the commission of the most self-destructive acts^m—

Doubtless much of our wickedness must be ascribed to our depraved appetites—

But our malicious adversary concurs with them, and actuates us by themⁿ—

While we continue unregenerate, we are altogether his vassals^o—

And the whole world, if viewed in a spiritual light, exhibits little else than such wretched spectacles as that before us^p—]

With such scenes, however, Jesus was continually conversant

II. The application made to Jesus on his behalf

The father of the youth had in vain applied to the disciples for relief

[The disciples had been endued with power to cast out devils^q—

But in this instance they were foiled in their attempt to exercise that power—

This disappointment afforded to the unbelieving Scribes much occasion for malicious triumph^r—

Our Lord, being asked afterwards by his disciples in private, assigned the reasons of their failure—

They had not made the attempt in the full exercise of faith^s—

Had they truly believed, nothing should have been impossible to them—

They had moreover neglected to use extraordinary means on this extraordinary occasion—

They should have had recourse to God in fasting and prayer^t—

From these circumstances we may gather much useful instruction—

Our

^k 1 Pet. v. 8.

^l Acts v. 3.

^m Acts xiii. 10.

ⁿ Compare John xii. 6. with Luke xxii. 3—5.

^o Eph. ii. 2.

^p 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^q Matt. x. 8.

^r Mark ix. 14.

^s Matt. xvii. 20.

^t Matt. xvii. 21. It seems from hence that some of the evil spirits have more power and malignity than others. See also Matt. xii. 45.

Our Lord has promised us the victory over all the powers of darkness^u—

But we must have our strength renewed by fasting and prayer^x—

And must put it forth in a believing dependence on his word^y—

Nor can we hope to succeed but in the use of these appointed means—]

He now applied to Jesus himself

[Kneeling with deepest humility, he implored the mercy which he needed^z—

But manifested that the disappointment he had experienced had shaken his faith even in Jesus himself^a—

Our Lord gently reproves him for his unbelief—

And bids him be more concerned about the increase of his own faith than about the ability of the person to whom he was applying^b—

The father instantly with tears confesses the justice of the reproof^c—

And intreats the Lord to increase and confirm his faith—

How amiable was this concern for his child, and this contrition for his fault!—

And should we be less earnest in interceding for our unconverted relatives?—

Like him, when human powers have failed, we are ready to question the sufficiency of God himself—

But we should be careful never to limit the almighty power of Jesus!—

And should deeply bewail the sad remains of unbelief that are within us!—

Let us then labour more to imitate this afflicted parent—

And in every application to Jesus offer that suitable petition^d—]

Like thousands of other suppliants he soon obtained his request

III. The miracle which Jesus wrought for him

Our Lord immediately interposed for the relief of the youth—

And Satan laboured to the utmost to obstruct his design

[Jesus ordered the young man to be brought unto him—
Satan,

^u Rom. xvi. 20.

^y Eph. vi. 16.

^a Mark ix. 22.

^c Ib. ver. 24.

^x Eph. vi. 18.

^z Matt. xvii. 14.

^b Mark ix. 23.

^d Ib. ver. 24.

Satan, enraged at the prospect of his own disgrace, assaulted him with greater fury than ever^e—

Nor left him, till he had made one more effort to destroy his life^f—

Satan exerted himself thus to defeat our Lord's purpose—

Our Lord permitted him thus to act for the more abundant display of his own power—

It is in this very manner that Satan still acts towards us—

He cannot endure that any soul should come to Jesus for help—

He usually makes his fiercest assaults upon us, when he is fearful of losing his dominion over us—

Yea, not infrequently does he reduce us almost to a despair of life, just before our perfect deliverance is about to be effected—]

But in vain were Satan's efforts against the sovereign power of Jesus

[Jesus raised up the youth, who lay, to all appearance, dead—

And delivered him in perfect health to his astonished father^g—

Thus shall also the grace of Jesus finally prevail in his people's hearts—

In vain shall be the renewed attacks of their great adversary—

However fiercely they be assaulted, they shall be more than conquerors^h—

And the malice of Satan shall only render them more distinguished monuments of their Redeemer's power—]

^e Luke ix. 42.

^f Mark ix. 26.

^g Luke ix. 42.

^h Rom. viii. 37.

CCCVI. CHRIST PAYING THE TRIBUTE MONEY.

Matt. xvii. 27. *Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take and give unto them for me and thee.*

THERE was nothing in the whole creation over which our Lord did not exert his sovereign authority—He not only overruled the spirits of men, but caused diseases and devils to flee at his command—The very beasts of the forest,

forest^a, and the fishes of the sea, were subject to his control, and yielded a ready obedience to his will—A most remarkable instance of his power over every living creature occurs in the passage before us—To elucidate it we shall consider

I. The circumstances under which he wrought the miracle

A certain tribute was about to be demanded of him

[This tribute was half a shekel^b—It was originally to be paid by every one above the age of twenty, whensoever the people should be numbered—It was called the ransom money, and an atonement for their souls, because it was an acknowledgment to God, that their lives had been justly forfeited, and were spared merely through his sovereign mercy—More was not to be paid by the rich, nor less by the poor, because the lives and the souls of all are of equal value in the sight of God, and there is but one ransom-price for all—It was to be applied to the service of the tabernacle and temple, in which all classes of men were alike interested, and to the due support of which all should contribute^c—]

From this, Jesus had a right to claim an exemption

[It is usual for kings to exact tribute, not of their own children, but of their subjects, and of the foreigners who trade with them—Now Jesus was the son of God, and the heir of all things—He therefore was not liable to pay the tax—And this right of exemption he stated to his servant Peter—]

But he waved his claim rather than give offence

[Just as his claim really was, it was not likely to be acknowledged by the tax-gatherers—If insisted on, it might have given them occasion to represent him as indifferent to the temple service—And it might perhaps have been drawn into a precedent by those who were God's *adopted* children—He therefore chose rather to wave his right than by insisting on it to produce contention—He would “not give occasion to those who sought occasion against him,” “nor suffer his good to be evil spoken of”—He would not do even a lawful thing if it might prove an occasion of offence^d—]

Under these circumstances he wrought the miracle which we are considering—We now proceed to

II. The miracle itself

So mean and abject was the condition of our Lord, that

^a Mark i. 13.

^b About fifteen pence of our money.

^c Exod. xxx. 12—16.

^d 1 Cor. viii. 13.

that he had not money wherewith to pay his tax—Hence he was constrained to supply his necessities by a miracle—In this miracle he discovered

1. His omniscience

[His all-penetrating eye beheld what was passing in the very depths of the sea—He knew that there was a fish, with one particular piece of money in its mouth—That it should be in the precise place where Peter should let down his hook—And that, coming to the hook, it should instantly be caught—What greater proof of omniscience could he give?—And what in heaven or earth can be concealed from him, who discovered these things with such infallible certainty?—]

2. His omnipotence

[It is not to be conceived that such improbable things should occur, if they had not been accomplished by the secret agency of his overruling Providence—Nor would HE have risked the credit of his divine mission upon such trifling incidents, if he had not foreordained that they should exactly correspond with his predictions—Can any thing then be impossible to him, who could thus overrule the motions of a creature so distant from him, and apparently so independent of him?—Surely no miracle whatever could more plainly evince his eternal power and godhead—]

From this miracle we may LEARN

1. Contentment with our lot

[The Lord's people are often most destitute and afflicted—But shall any repine at poverty when he reflects on the condition of our blessed Lord?—Though he was Lord of all things, yet had he not a place where to lay his head, or a piece of silver to pay his tax—Let all then be satisfied with their lot, however humble—Let us not judge of God's love to us by the outward dispensations of his providence—Let us remember that, if God be our God, we are rich indeed, however poor our outward circumstances may be—The state of Lazarus was infinitely better than that of his rich ungodly neighbour—The true believer, though *visibly* he should “have nothing, yet in fact, possesses all things”—]

2. Submission to our governors

[Our Lord submitted cheerfully to all the ordinances both of God and man—Nor would he needlessly give offence by rigorously insisting even on his just rights—Alas! how different is the conduct of many who profess themselves his followers!—*He* paid a tax which was not really due, rather than contend about it; whereas *they* clamour about the taxes which are legally due, and use every mean artifice to evade them—*He* paid notwithstanding he was constrained to work a miracle

in order to gain the money, when he would have violated no law if he had withheld the tribute; while *they*, without any such urgent necessity, violate the most express commands of God, in refusing to “render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s,” and to “pay tribute to whom tribute is due”—Let such persons blush at their unworthy conduct, and learn to “walk as Christ walked”—]

3. Affiance in our Lord

[To what situation can any one be reduced, wherein Christ will not be able to discern and to supply his wants?—Are we embarrassed with *temporal* distresses? The Lord can multiply our barrel of meal, or send us fresh supplies by a raven or a fish—Nor though his interposition shall be less visible, shall it ever be withheld from those who ask it—He requires indeed that we should be diligent in our lawful calling; and it is usually *in this way* that he will (as he did on this occasion) send us relief—But the promise is sure to all, That, “if we seek him first, all needful things shall be added unto us”—Are our difficulties of a *spiritual* nature? He is at no loss to succour and support us—He will surely strengthen us according to our day of trial, and shew himself a present help in the time of need—Let all then trust in him, and say with David, “The Lord is my shepherd, therefore shall I lack nothing”—]

CCCVII. THE INFIRM WOMAN CURED.

Luke xiii. 15, 16. *The Lord then answered him and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo! these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath-day?*

THE command to sanctify the sabbath was given to man in Paradise, and was perpetuated to all generations when it was engraven on stones by God himself, together with the other precepts of the law—But the sanctification of that day consists, not in a mere abstinence from bodily labour, but in a suspension of all temporal cares, and an application of soul to spiritual duties—This appears from the conduct of our Lord himself—He never was more active than on the sabbath-day—And, when censured by superstitious hypocrites, he

he vindicated himself by shewing that works of necessity and mercy were perfectly compatible with that holy rest which God had enjoined—To this effect he spake in the passage before us; in discoursing upon which, we shall consider

I. The miracle he wrought

There was in the synagogue a woman much afflicted in body

[By the force of some disorder her whole frame was so contracted or relaxed, that she was utterly incapable of standing upright—This disorder had been, in some way or other, inflicted on her by Satan—The same wicked spirit, who smote Job with boils, and possessed the bodies of many in our Saviour's days, had exerted his power over her—And she had been no less than eighteen years in this deplorable condition—Yet as she was not ashamed to go to the synagogue on account of her deformity, so neither would she be detained from it by her weakness—Alas! how many amongst us absent themselves from the house of God under far less plausible pretexts, notwithstanding our ordinances are so incomparably superior to those which she was privileged to attend—]

Our Lord, well knowing her case, afforded her a miraculous relief

[He needed not to have his compassion moved by earnest intreaties—Unsolicited he called her to him—And by the imposition of his hand conveyed an instantaneous cure—Thus he shewed how easily he could “destroy the works of the devil^a,” and that neither length of time nor inveteracy of disorder could at all obstruct the efficacy of his word—]

The censure which he incurred on account of this benevolent act, called forth

II. His vindication of it

The ruler of the synagogue expressed his indignation at this exercise of power

[That which in reality hurt his feelings was, the popularity of Jesus—He could not endure to see him followed by such multitudes, and confirming his divine Mission by such miracles—But, because he could not with the smallest appearance of reason condemn the miracle he had seen, he pretended to be offended at its being wrought on the sabbath-day—He proceeded to reprove the people for paying so little regard to that holy day; and thus obliquely cast reflections on our Lord himself—What an evidence of his enmity against Christ,

Christ, and of his being altogether destitute of compassion to his fellow-creatures!—And how thin the veil under which he endeavoured to cover these detestable qualities!—]

Our Lord however vindicated his own conduct in a most unanswerable manner

[He tacitly acknowledged the necessity of sanctifying the sabbath—But appealed to his hearers, Whether such a work as he had performed were any breach of it—If *they* universally considered themselves at liberty to loose an ox or an ass from the stall in order to give it water on the sabbath-day, how much more justifiable was *he* in loosing the *far sorer bands* of a *rational being*, yea, of a *daughter of Abraham*, on that day; more especially, *when it was Satan himself, who had bound her*; when she too had been no less than *eighteen years* in that state; and when he had effected her cure simply by a touch of his hand—Such was our Lord's argument; and it flashed conviction upon every mind—Thus while the ruler's hypocrisy was detected, and the adversaries, who had sided with him, were put to shame, our Saviour's character rose in the estimation of all the people—]

OBSERVATIONS

1. What blindness and hypocrisy are there in the human heart!

[Every one sees in an instant how deservedly our Lord reproached the ruler for his hypocrisy—And we are ready to suppose that *we* should never have indulged so vile a disposition—But there is nothing more common than the very spirit he manifested—He condemned people for seeking the healing of their bodies on the *sabbath-day*: And are there none who hate to behold men seeking the salvation of their souls on the *week-day*?—I know that *these* will plead a regard for order and the institutions of man; but the ruler had a still stronger plea, namely, a regard for the sabbath, and the express commandments of God—Yet, whatever they may think, neither the one nor the other are upright before God—The objections of both originate in the same evil disposition, a want of regard for the Saviour's honour and for the welfare of their fellow-creatures—On this account the Judge of quick and dead called *him* an hypocrite. By what name I pray you will he call *these*, when they shall stand before him at his tribunal?—Is not the soul of as much value as the body? and are we not as much justified in promoting its welfare on a week-day, or on the sabbath evening, as a diseased person is in seeking relief for his body upon the sabbath-day?—Let us all then acknowledge the evil of our own hearts; and give God the glory if we be in any measure freed from the prejudices by which so many in every age and place are blinded—]

2. How

2. How desirable is it to embrace every opportunity of waiting upon God!

[The woman broke through every difficulty that she might honour the public institutions of religion—And was she not well repaid for her trouble at last?—Surely the restoration of her body to health and strength was a blessing that would have abundantly compensated for still greater toil than she ever endured—And have none amongst us received a still richer recompence?—If your bodily disorders have not been removed, have you never received grace both to bear and improve them?—Have none of you been delivered from the bonds in which Satan held your souls?—Has not your guilt been removed, and the corruption of your hearts been in some measure healed?—Let this encourage all to wait upon God—Let it make you fearful of yielding to any excuses, lest you be absent from the ordinances at the very time that Jesus shall manifest his presence there—Say not, I can serve God as well at home; for it is not the means we use, but the blessing of God upon them that renders them effectual to our benefit;—And God's blessing cannot be expected, if we seek it not in the way of his appointment—And if proud and envious hypocrites exclaim against you, regard it not—Your Saviour himself will vindicate your conduct, to your honour, and to their confusion—]

3. With what comfortable hope may we look to Jesus under all our troubles!

[It is alike easy to him to save from temporal or spiritual disorders—A touch of his hand, or word of his mouth, will convey the blessing we desire—Are we then labouring under any affliction of mind or body? Are we, like David, “bowed down greatly, and do we go mourning all the day long^b?”—Behold, it is the Saviour's office to bind up that which is broken, to heal that which is sick, and to raise up them that are bowed down^c—Nor can we doubt but that he, who prevented the application of this afflicted woman, will come at our intreaty, and impart the aid which we implore—Let us all then direct our eyes unto him—And may we all become monuments of his power and grace for his mercy's sake, Amen—]

^b Ps. xxxviii. 6.

^c Isai. lxi. 1. Ps. cxlvi. 8.

CCCVIII. THE MAN CURED OF THE DROPSY.

Luke xiv. 1—4. *And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath—*

sabbath-day, that they watched him. And behold, there was a certain man before him, which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath-day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go.

ALTHOUGH the gospel requires those who embrace it to become dead to the world, it does not forbid us to maintain occasional and friendly intercourse with unenlightened men—St. Paul rectifies a mistake which had arisen in the church upon this very subject, and tells us that to renounce *all* connexion with the ungodly, would be to exclude ourselves from the world altogether^a—But peculiar caution is necessary when we are in their company—And the most effectual way of counteracting their pernicious influence is, to labour to do them good—This we may learn from our Lord's own example in the history before us—He was in a Pharisee's house, whither he had been invited to dinner—And his conduct there will afford us many useful lessons—We shall consider

I. The character of those who entertained our Lord

The lawyers and Pharisees professed an high regard for religion—And on this occasion appeared to act a very friendly part—But they soon manifested

1. Their inveterate malignity

[Under the mask of friendship they were traitors at heart—They “watched” our Lord's words and actions, not with a desire to receive instruction, but with a determination to seize an opportunity of traducing his character and destroying his life—Such was their employment on the sabbath-day, when they should have been more particularly in the exercise of all holy affections—Such was their return to our Lord for all his condescension and kindness—And such was their conduct while they wished to be esteemed as patterns of sanctity and virtue—Would to God that this spirit had died with them!—But are there none in this day likeminded with them?—Do none, who appear friendly in their outward conduct, occupy themselves with watching the words and actions of a godly person, marking any fault with critical acuteness, and animadverting upon it afterwards with malicious pleasure?—Do none even on the sabbath-day attend the public ministration of the word, with this captious disposition, disdaining to receive

^a 1 Cor. v. 9, 10.

receive instruction, and seeking only to find some expressions which they may report and ridicule?—]

2. Their utter want of candour

[Our Lord put a simple question to them, “in answer” to what he knew to be passing in their minds—There was but one answer that could possibly be given to it—But they knew that a just reply would subvert their own superstitious notions, and justify our Lord in a conduct which they wished to condemn—Unable to maintain the sentiments they professed, and unwilling to acknowledge their error, they held their peace—What a base and disingenuous spirit was this!—Yet, how many resemble them!—If we address the consciences of some, how backward are they to acknowledge the plainest and most unquestionable truths!—If they be compelled to give their assent to any position which militates against their practice, they shew, in the very mode of assenting, a fixed determination to resist every inference that may be drawn from their concession—If invited to consider calmly the most important and most obvious truths, they will “shun the light lest their deeds should be reproved”—They have no ears to hear, no eyes to see any thing that condemns themselves; but are all eye, and all ear, when a religious person is to be exposed—Nor is this character found only among the profane; but often among those who affect a great regard for religion, and sometimes even among those, whose office calls them to propagate and defend it^b—]

Difficult as the path of Jesus was hereby rendered, he was enabled to preserve himself unblameable in

II. His conduct towards them

In every part of our Lord’s demeanor he was a pattern of all perfection—On this occasion in particular we cannot but admire

1. His wisdom

[Conscious as he was of the rectitude of his ways, he was nevertheless concerned to obviate the prejudices which subsisted in the minds of others—On this account he put the question respecting the sanctification of the sabbath, before he proceeded to work the miracle; and again, after he had wrought it, appealed to them respecting their own practice—Thus, though he did not convert, he at least confounded them, and prevented those clamours which they would otherwise have raised against him—Worthy is this example to be followed by all who embrace the gospel—We cannot extirpate the

^b The lawyers, as well as Pharisees, are mentioned in the text.

the prejudices of men; but we should blunt the edge of them—We should condescend to reason even on the most obvious truths, and to defend, by argument, the most blameless conduct—We should endeavour to “cut off occasion from those who seek occasion” against us^e—We should “shew out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom^d,” and prevent, as much as possible, “our good from being evil spoken of^e”—]

2. His fortitude

[When he saw their obstinacy, he was not deterred from doing his Father’s will—He would do good, even at the peril of his life, rather than lose the opportunity afforded him—He therefore healed the man of his dropsy, and dismissed him, lest *he* also should be exposed to their murderous rage—Thus should we act, whenever we are opposed in the way of duty—While we labour to disarm our adversaries by a meek and gentle behaviour, we must not fear them—We should say, like Nehemiah, “Shall such a man as I flee?”—We should be ready to face any danger and suffer any extremity rather than decline from the path which God, in his word or providence, has marked out for us—]

Two or three CAUTIONS naturally arise from this subject

1. Let us be on our guard when in the company of the ungodly

[The more friendly the world appear, the more are we in danger of being ensnared by them—While they continue carnal, they cannot but retain a rooted enmity against spiritual things—Though therefore considerations of honour, interest, or consanguinity, may restrain their anger, they will “watch for our halting^f,” they will seek to find some matter of offence in us, that they may seem the more justified in following their own ways^g—Let us then be doubly on our guard when in their company—Let us “keep our lips as with a bridle”—And pray to God to “lead us because of our observers^h”—]

2. Let us study that not even our good may be evil spoken of

[A thing may be good in itself, and yet be imprudent as to the manner in which it is carried into execution—The primitive Christians were at liberty respecting the eating of meats offered to idols; yet in the use of their liberty they might offend their weaker brethren, and sin against Christ—It is a great part of Christian prudence to discern persons,
times

^a 2 Cor. xi. 12.

^d Jam. iii. 13.

^e Rom. xiv. 16.

^f Jer. xx. 10.

^g Ps. xxxv. 19—21, 25.

^h See Ps. v. 8. in the marginal translation.

times and circumstances, that we may be able to adapt ourselves to the exigencies of the occasion—Let this then be our endeavour—Let us “walk in wisdom toward them that are without,” and endeavour to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men by well doingⁱ”—]

3. Let us proceed without fear in the way of duty

[Daniel and the Hebrew youths would not conform to the sinful practices of others, notwithstanding they were threatened by the tyrants of their day—Our Lord also was continually opposed by the most malignant adversaries—Yet both he and they chose to persist in what was right at the risk of their lives, rather than violate the dictates of their conscience—Thus let us be ready to live or die for God—Let us willingly “endure the contradiction of sinners against ourselves”—Let us put away that “fear of man which bringeth a snare^k ;” and continue “stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord^l”—]

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 15.

^k Prov. lxix. 25.

^l 1 Cor. xv. 58.

CCCIX. THE TEN LEPERS HEALED.

Luke xvii. 17, 18. *And Jesus answering, said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.*

AS the miracles of our Lord were greatly diversified, so were the effects produced by them—

Sometimes they were regarded with stupid indifference—

At other times they were made effectual to the conversion of sinners—

We have an instance of both in the history before us

I. Consider the various circumstances mentioned in the context

The leprosy, though little known amongst us, was very common in Judea—

Ten persons infected with it made application to Jesus for relief—

[Jesus had just been refused admission into a Samaritan village^a—

On

^a Luke ix. 52, 53, 56. with ver. 12. See Dr. Doddridge's Fam. Expos. sect. 127.

On his entrance into another village, the lepers saw him—

How graciously was the bigotry of the Samaritans overruled for good!—

Had *they* used the common rights of hospitality, perhaps the lepers might never have had the opportunity that was now afforded them—

It was not permitted to lepers to approach even their dearest friends—

They therefore “stood afar off,” crying earnestly for relief—

A sense of need will make us importunate in our supplications—

But, alas! the generality are far more anxious for the removal of bodily disorders, than of spiritual maladies—

Happy were it for us, if our fervour were most expressed in the concerns which most demand it!—]

Jesus instantly vouchsafed a gracious answer to their petition

[He did not indeed pronounce them whole, or even promise to make them so—

He only ordered them to go to the priests, the appointed judges of leprosy^b—

This however amounted to a virtual promise of healing, unless he intended only to mock and deride their misery—

And it answered many valuable and important purposes—

It served as a test of their faith and obedience—

Their instant departure would prevent any combination to discredit the miracle—

It would make the priests themselves to attest its reality—

And might lead them to receive him as the promised Messiah—

In obedience to his command the lepers went, expecting a cure—

Nor were any of them disappointed of their hope—

In going, they were restored by the almighty power of Jesus—

And they felt in themselves infallible tokens of perfect health—]

The effects however produced upon them were not alike in all

[Nine of them prosecuted their journey mindful only of their own comfort—

Having obtained all that they wished, they forgot their Benefactor—

Nor

^b Ver. 14, with Lev. xiv. 2.

Nor ever thought of paying the debt which gratitude demanded—

One, however, was more sensible of the obligations conferred upon him—

And burned with a desire to acknowledge the mercies he had received—

Returning instantly, he prostrated himself at the feet of Jesus—

With heartfelt gratitude he glorified God as the author of his mercy—

And gave thanks to Jesus, as the instrument by whom it was sent—

Nor was he less ardent in his thanksgivings, than he had before been importunate in his prayers {—}

To open these more minutely, we shall

II. Make some reflections on the text in particular

The first reflection which naturally arises from the text is,

1. What ingratitude is there in the human heart!

[We are amazed at the conduct of the ungrateful lepers—

We are ready to suppose that nothing could induce us to act like them—

Yet we may see in them a true picture of the world at large—

How many *temporal* mercies have we experienced through our whole lives!—

What continuance of health, or deliverances from sickness!—

What freedom from want, or relief in the midst of it!—

What comfort in the society of our friends and relatives!—

Yet how little have we thought of him, who bestowed these blessings!—

How many *spiritual* mercies too have we received from God!—

What provision has been made for the healing of our souls!—

The Son of God himself has suffered, that he might “heal us by his stripes”—

And offers of pardon and salvation have been proclaimed to us in his name—

Yea, we have been promised a deliverance from the leprosy of sin^d—

And have been intreated to become children and heirs of God—

Are not these mercies which demand our gratitude?—

Yet what returns have we made to our adorable Benefactor?—

May not God complain of us as he did of the ungrateful Jews^e?—

Let us then abase ourselves before God under a sense of our vileness^f—

Nor let us justify our conduct from the example of the world—

Who does not commend the singularity of the grateful leper?—

Who does not admire the singularity of Noah among the antediluvians, and of Lot in Sodom?—

Let us then dare to be singular in loving and adoring our Benefactor—

Let a sense of gratitude far outweigh the fear of man—

Then, though the world despise us, we shall have the testimony of a good conscience—

And “our record shall be on high” in the day of the Lord Jesus^g.—]

2. How often do they, who enjoy the greatest advantages, make the least improvement of them!

[The nine ungrateful lepers were, by profession, the Lord’s people—

They had been instructed out of the law by God’s appointed ministers—

The wonderful works which had been wrought for their nation could not be unknown to them—

The examples of David and other eminent saints had been set before them—

They therefore could not but know much of God’s will respecting them—

The poor “Samaritan,” on the contrary, was a “stranger” to God’s covenant—

The prejudices of his nation forbad all intercourse with the Jews—

By this means he was cut off from all opportunities of instruction—

Yet he returned to glorify his God, while all the Jews overlooked the mercy vouchsafed unto them—

And are there not many amongst ourselves, who are far from improving their spiritual advantages?—

Are we not surpassed in virtue by many who never enjoyed our privileges?—

Are there not many illiterate and obscure persons whose hearts overflow with gratitude, while ours are as insensible as a stone?—

Let us remember that God expects from us according to the means of improvement he has afforded us^h—

And

^e Isai. i. 2, 3.

^f Job xvi. 19.

^g Job xlii. 6.

^h Luke xii. 48.

And let us labour to yield fruit suited to the culture bestowed upon usⁱ—]

3. How plain is our duty both under a need, and after the receipt, of divine mercies!

[The lepers could not possibly have adopted a wiser measure than they did—

They were persuaded of Christ's power to help; and they sought help at his hands—

And is not Jesus as mighty now as in the days of his flesh?—

Will not the diseases of the soul, as well as of the body, yield to his commands?—

Has he not encouraged us by many express promises of mercy?—

Let us then, like the lepers, cry, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us"—

Nor let us cease from our importunity till we have prevailed—

But if we have received answers of peace, let us be thankful for them^k—

Justly did Jesus express his wonder at not seeing the other nine—

Much more will he, if *we* should forget to pay him our tribute of praise—

Waiting for our approaches, he says, "Where are they?"—

Let him then see us daily prostrating ourselves before him—

Let us be earnest in our thanksgivings as well as in our prayers—

Let us often consider how we may best express our sense of his goodness^l—

In his strength let us go and shew ourselves to the world—

Let us compel his very enemies to acknowledge his work^m—

And constrain them by our lives to confess the efficacy of his grace—

Thus shall we most acceptably honour him on earth—

And ere long be exalted to magnify his name in heaven—]

ⁱ Isai. v. 2—6.

^l Ps. cxvi. 12.

^k Ps. xxx. 2.

^m Ps. cxxvi. 2.

CCCX. THE BLIND MAN HEALED AT THE POOL OF SILOAM.

John ix. 6, 7. *When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and anointed the eyes of the blind man with clay, and said unto him, Go wash in the pool of Siloam (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.*

THERE is reason to think that all the miracles of our Lord were intended as emblems of the spiritual blessings

which he came to bestow--But in interpreting scripture it is better to assign to every passage a sense which is clear and determinate, than to wander into the regions of conjecture—In some places however the mystical meaning is pointed out by the inspired writers themselves; and then we may follow them without doubt or fear—Such is the case with respect to the miracle before us; in considering which it will be proper to notice

I. The historical fact

[The disciples seeing a man that had been blind from his birth, enquired of our Lord whether the sins of his parents, or any sins of his own in a former state of existence^a, had been the occasion of that calamity being inflicted on him? Our Lord informed them, that it was owing to a far different cause: that it had been ordained of God on purpose “that the works of God might be made manifest in him,” and that in him the Messiah might be glorified—What a consoling thought is this to those who have endured long and heavy afflictions, That God perhaps has sent those afflictions *on purpose* to glorify the riches of his grace and love by means of them!—Who would not submit to be reduced to the state of this blind beggar, in order to be made the honoured instrument of glorifying God, and the happy monument of his power and grace?—

Our blessed Lord, determining to heal him, made clay of his own spittle, and put it on his eyes, and bade him wash in the pool of Siloam. How strange a remedy was this! In itself, it was more calculated to put out the eyes of one that could see, than to give sight to one that was blind—But Jesus did it, to shew, that he can work by any means, however inadequate; that we must submit to use the means which he prescribes; and that in the use of his instituted ordinances we may expect his blessings—

The man complied with the injunctions given him, and found the desired blessing—One would suppose that the sight of this stupendous miracle must have convinced all that Jesus was the Messiah: but a determined infidel nothing will convince—The Pharisees were determined not to believe in Jesus: they therefore endeavoured at first to disprove the miracle. When that was established beyond a possibility of doubt, they made the performing of the miracle on the sabbath-day a ground of accusation against Jesus, and cried out against it as a scandalous violation of the sabbath—When they saw the conviction

^a It should seem that the Pythagorean notion, of the transmigration of souls, prevailed among the Jews of that day.

conviction that was fastened on the minds of the more ingenuous, they enacted a law, that every one who should confess Jesus to be the Messiah, should be excommunicated—Such are the weapons with which ungodly men have ever combated the truth of God: when they fail in argument, they have recourse to authority, and establish that by pains and penalties, which they have in vain laboured to maintain by an appeal to reason or scripture—

The parents of the man were intimidated and silenced; but the man that had received the benefit, boldly vindicated the character of his benefactor. His arguments were irresistible: but they served only to incense the haughty Pharisees, and to bring upon himself the sentence of excommunication—Thus will every truly enlightened man confess his Saviour; and, when called to suffer for him, will take up his cross with cheerful resignation, yea, and rejoice that he is counted worthy to bear it—

Our blessed Lord soon found his faithful confessor, and amply rewarded his fidelity by a fuller manifestation of himself, and a more abundant communication of grace to his soul—And thus will he recompense all who suffer for his sake: they shall have an hundredfold now in this present life, and “in the world to come life everlasting^b”—]

Forbearing to notice the more minute incidents, we pass on to

II. The typical interpretation

We cannot conceive why the Evangelist should give the typical import of the word Siloam, unless to intimate, that the whole miracle had a typical reference—The word Siloam means, Sent; and was intended to prefigure the true “Shiloh^c,” “the messenger of the covenant^d,” the sent of God^e, the Messiah that should come into the world—And the miracle wrought there typically represents

1. The state of mankind by nature

[The man by the special providence of God was *born* blind, in order that he might more fitly characterize the state and condition of unregenerate men. They are universally blind by nature, and as blind with respect to spiritual things as this poor man was with respect to all the objects around him. He could form some crude notions about them by means of feeling; but he could discern no one thing aright: so the men of this world may by reading obtain some faint idea of
spiritual

^b Mark x. 29, 30.

^d Mal. iii. 1.

^c Gen. xlix. 10.

^e John x. 36.

spiritual things; but they have no just apprehension of them at all—To prove that all natural men are blind, we need not descend to particulars, or shew that they cannot discern this and that particular truth; there is one question that may determine the point at once; Do *all*, or do *any* of those who are in the broad road, see whither they are going? do they not universally think, or hope at least, that notwithstanding all which God has spoken^f, they shall go to heaven when they die?—If further proof be wanted, let an appeal be made to scripture, and God himself will put the matter beyond dispute^g—Nothing can more justly represent our state than the man on whom this miracle was wrought—]

2. The end for which Christ came into the world

[Our Lord himself gave this exposition to the miracle, at the very time he wrought it^h; and enforced it afterwards by more express declarations—He was not only to be a light to lighten the worldⁱ, but was to open the eyes of the blind^k. He was not only to set before men truths which they were unacquainted with before, but to open their hearts, that they might give attention to them^l, and their understandings, that they might understand them^m—

The very manner in which he imparts his blessings, is also not obscurely intimated in the miracle before us. As the means he used were very inadequate to the end proposed, so, for the advancement of his own glory, he uses the ministry of weak and sinful men, and by their word he turns men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto Godⁿ—Even supposing that we were able of ourselves to convince the judgments of men, we can no more give them spiritual discernment, than the clay and water could give organs of vision to the blind beggar—But, as an ordinance appointed by Jesus, and accompanied with his Spirit, our preaching is made instrumental to the enlightening and saving of many souls. And the weakness of the instruments used by him, is rendered subservient to his more abundant honour^o—]

Our blessed Lord has given us a yet further insight into the miracle, by suggesting to us

III. The spiritual improvement

[There was to be a judicial discrimination in the ministry of our Lord for the purpose of encouraging the humble, and confounding the proud^p—The great line of distinction between men

^f Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^h Ver. 5.

^k Isai. xlii. 6, 7.

^m Luke xxiv. 45.

^o 2 Cor. iv. 7.

^g Rev. iii. 17. 1 Cor. ii. 14.

ⁱ Luke ii. 32.

^l Acts xvi. 14.

ⁿ Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

^p Ver. 39.

men is this; some are sensible of their blindness, and desire to be divinely enlightened; and others imagine that they already see, and therefore disregard all offers of spiritual illumination—

With respect to *the former*, Christ came to give them sight; and, if they will apply to him in the use of his appointed ordinances, he will assuredly vouchsafe to them the benefit they desire—He declares that this was the very intent of his coming into the world^a—And he counsels all to apply to him for the eye-salve that shall effectually remedy their wants^r—If they do this, their want of education, or even weakness of intellect, shall be no obstacle in their way; he will “reveal to babes and sucklings the things which are hid from the wise and prudent^s”—

With respect to *the latter*, he will leave them to the operation of their own minds, and give them up to their own delusions—He will not actively mislead them; nor is there any need that he should in order to produce the increase of blindness in them: for if left to themselves, they will bewilder themselves in their own reasonings, and confirm themselves more and more in their own errors—Their prejudices, their passions, and their interests, will concur to lead them astray, and their great adversary the devil, will obstruct the entrance of light into their minds^t; and thus they will eventually be “taken in their own craftiness^u,” and “utterly perish in their own corruptions^x”—

The improvement then which our Lord himself teaches us to make of this miracle is, to cultivate a sense of our own blindness, and to “become fools in order that we may be wise^y”—If we be “wise in our own conceits, there is more hope of a fool^z,” or of any other character in the universe, than of us. On the contrary, if we be deeply humbled before God as destitute of all spiritual discernment, the “scales shall soon be made to fall from our eyes,” and the “Spirit of the living God will guide us into all truth”—]

ADDRESS

[All of us must of necessity resemble the man while his blindness continued, or after it had been removed—Let us then enquire whether we can say with him, “This I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see^a?” If we cannot, let us remember that the Saviour is nigh at hand, and that the means used for our illumination, weak as they are, are quite sufficient, if accompanied with his power—Let us take encouragement to ask the influences of his good Spirit, and to pray

^a Luke iv. 18.

^b Matt. xi. 25.

^c 1 Cor. iii. 19.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 18.

^r Rev. iii. 18.

^t 2 Cor. iv. 4.

^u 2 Pet. ii. 12.

^x Prov. xvi. 12.

pray with David, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"^b—On the other hand, if our eyes have been opened, let us boldly confess our benefactor, and willingly bear whatever infidel rulers or persecuting bigots may inflict upon us for his sake—Let us, like Christ himself, endure the cross, and despise the shame. Let us "be faithful unto death, and he will give us a crown of life"—]

^b Ps. cxix. 18.

CCCXI. LAZARUS RAISED.

John xi. 40. *Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?*

SUCH is the state of God's people upon earth, that they can scarcely ever come into trying circumstances without discovering the frailty of their nature, and laying themselves open to reproof from their divine Master. But in all the rebukes which our Lord gave his disciples, we may notice a peculiar tenderness, like that of a parent towards his beloved child^a. In the passages before us he had occasion to remove the unbelief of Martha: but he could not possibly have done it in milder terms.

We purpose to consider

I. The occasion of his words

Our Lord, at the request of Mary and Martha, was about to raise Lazarus

[The afflicted sisters, when they despaired of their brother's life, except through the intervention of a miracle, sent to Jesus to come and heal him: and Jesus returned them a favourable, but inexplicable answer^b. Apparently forgetful of their request, he continued where he was two days longer, and did not reach Bethany till Lazarus had been dead four days^c. But on coming thither, he renewed the promise which he had before made them, and had given an order for the removal

^a Matt. xiv. 31. Mark ix. 35—37.

^b Ver. 4.

^c Bethabara beyond Jordan was rather a long day's journey from Bethany. It is probable that Lazarus, being in the last extremity, died soon after the messenger had set off. Hence the day occupied in his going to Jesus, with the day spent by Jesus in coming thither, and the two days delay, will account easily for the time that Lazarus had been dead.

removal of the stone in order that he might call forth their brother from the grave^d—]

But Martha, yielding to unbelief, attempted to divert him from his purpose

[She had just before confessed his omnipotence; but now began to doubt it. She supposed that the state of the corpse precluded a possibility of its restoration to life. Alas! how weak was her faith when put to the trial! A daughter of Abraham indeed she was; but unlike her progenitor in this instance^e. Instead of believing with him, she staggered at the promise, like Sarah; and incurred on that account the displeasure of her Lord^f—]

Jesus, however, receded not from his intentions; as we shall see by considering

II. The manner in which they were fulfilled

With an authoritative voice he bade the dead come forth

[Having returned thanks to his Father for giving him this opportunity of glorifying both himself and him^g, he spake the word; and immediately Lazarus came forth, clad in the solemn appendages of death. With what astonishment must the doubting, disconsolate sisters have been filled! With what love and gratitude must their hearts have glowed, while they embraced their lost returning brother! And what an earnest was now afforded of that great event, when “all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth^h!”—]

By this was the glory of God most signally displayed

[Who could refrain from magnifying him who had condescended thus to hear the requests of two feeble mortals, and to exert such almighty power on their behalf? Who could, after this, entertain a doubt of Christ's divine mission, or of his power to quicken the bodies or souls of whomsoever he would? Some indeed there were, whose rancour, instead of being

^d It would not be unprofitable to comment *briefly* on the many beautiful incidents that are crowded together in this short history; and to notice *the plea which the sisters urged*, ver. 3, (not Lazarus' merit, but Christ's love to him;) *our Lord's trying of their faith and patience by his delay*, ver. 6; *his fortitude*, ver. 7, 8; *the light in which he represented the death of Lazarus, and his intention to raise him*, ver. 11; *his full and seasonable manifestation of himself to Martha under her affliction, with her noble confession*, ver. 25—27; *his tender sympathy*, ver. 35; and *deep concern for the unbelief which he saw in the hearts of many*, ver. 33, 38.

^e Rom. iv. 20.

^f Ver. 41.

^g Gen. xviii. 12—15.

^h John v. 28, 29.

being extinguished, was inflamed by this miracle: but many were constrained by it to believe on his nameⁱ—]

While we see by this miracle how just were our Lord's reproofs to Martha, let us notice particularly

III. The lessons we should learn from them

1. We should at all times remember, and expect the accomplishment of the words of Jesus

[Our Lord speaks to us in his word, as truly as he did to Martha, or to any of his disciples. And when he shall ask, "said I not thus and thus unto thee?" it will be to little purpose for us to urge that we were ignorant of his sayings; for we ought to know them, and to treasure them up in our minds; and to be as much assured that all his promises and threats shall be accomplished, as if we had already seen them executed before our eyes. Let this thought be applied to any individual promise or threatening, and we shall be utterly inexcusable, if either from presumption or despondency we live unmindful of his word—]

2. The more we exercise faith in God, the more will God reveal his glory to us

[Our Lord himself could not do many mighty works at Nazareth because of their unbelief^k: but for those who have exercised faith in him, he has wrought the greatest wonders. Let those who have relied upon him for the supply of their temporal wants, or for strength against their spiritual adversaries, testify whether he have not, on many occasions, exceeded their most sanguine hopes? We must not indeed expect at his hands any thing which he has not promised; but, if we rest on his word, it shall, if not immediately, yet in the fittest season, be fulfilled to us. Nothing should be too great for him to do; if a soul were dead as the corpse of Lazarus, yea, and as full of corruption too, Jesus would quicken it in answer to the prayer of faith, and would raise it to a new and heavenly life: and the more we lived by faith upon him, the more would he interpose on our behalf, and glorify himself in all the dispensations of his providence and grace.]

ⁱ Ver. 45, 46.

^k Matt. xiii. 58.

CCCXII. BLIND BARTIMEUS CURED.

Mark x. 49, 50. *And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garments, rose, and came to Jesus.*

OUR

OUR Lord, like the sun in the firmament, prosecuted without intermission the great ends of his ministry, diffusing innumerable blessings wheresoever he bent his course—The miracle which he performed at Jericho, though similar in many respects to some others which are recorded, has some circumstances peculiar to itself, which deserve to be attentively considered—St. Matthew mentions two persons who were joint-petitioners on this occasion; but St. Mark confines his narration to Bartimeus alone, as the more noted of the two, and as the chief speaker—To comprehend the most important incidents in this history, we shall consider

I. The state of the person whom Jesus called

Bartimeus was a distressed and humble suppliant for mercy

[He was both blind, and necessitated to subsist upon the precarious bounty of those who might pass him on the highway—Who would have thought that God should suffer one, towards whom he had designs of love and mercy, to be reduced to so low a state? Yet such is his sovereign appointment in many instances; his own children are lying at the gate full of sores, while his enemies are faring sumptuously every day—Hearing that Jesus passed by, this blind man earnestly importuned his aid—He would not lose the opportunity which now occurred; nor cease from his cries till he had obtained his request—His language was expressive of an assured faith in Jesus the promised Messiah, at the very time that the rulers and Pharisees almost unanimously rejected him—Thus it is frequently found, that those things which are hid from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes—]

Afflictive as such a condition is, it affords a pleasant and hopeful prospect

[Distress of any kind cannot but be an object of commiseration—But none is so much to be deprecated as the blindness of the mind—The loss of eye-sight is no more worthy to be compared with this, than the body with the soul, or time with eternity—Miserable beyond description are they, the eyes of whose understanding have never yet been enlightened to behold the wonderful things of God's law—But if we be sensible of our blindness; if we be calling upon Jesus as the appointed and all-sufficient Saviour, if we be persevering in prayer notwithstanding all our discouragements, and saying, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," we are surely in an hopeful state; we are not far from the kingdom of God—]

In confirmation of this point we proceed to shew

II. The encouragement which the call of Jesus afforded him

The command which Jesus gave was announced to Bartimeus with joyful congratulations

[Jesus had declined for some time to notice his cries, but at last commanded him to be brought unto him—What a gleam of hope must instantly have irradiated the mind of this poor suppliant!—A few minutes before, he had been rebuked by the multitude, and bidden to hold his peace; but, happily for him, their rebukes had operated to quicken rather than to damp his ardour—Now also the voices of those, who had checked him, were changed, and their rebukes were turned to encouraging exhortations—The very call was deemed an earnest of the mercy that had been solicited—]

And are not the calls of Jesus a ground of encouragement to all who feel their need of mercy?

[He does not, it is true, call any of us by name—But the minute descriptions given of those whom he does invite, are far more satisfactory to the soul, than the most express mention of our names could be—We might doubt whether there were not others of our name; but who can doubt whether he be a sinner, a lost sinner?—Yet such are repeatedly declared to be the very persons whom he came to seek and save—Are we, like the blind man, longing for mercy, and striving to obtain it? It is impossible to doubt whether Jesus have mercy in store for us, since he particularly calls to him “every one that thirsteth”—Only let his invitations be treasured up in our minds, and we shall never despond, never shall entertain a doubt of obtaining our desire at last—]

Participating in the general joy which this call excited, let us trace

III. The effect it produced upon him

He arose and went to Jesus without delay

[Intent upon one point of infinite importance, he disregarded his garment, as the Samaritan woman on another occasion did her water-pot—Or perhaps, fearing that it would retard his motion, he cast it away, that he might the more speedily obey the summons—Valuable as it must have been to one so poor, he utterly despised it, when the prospect of a cure had cheered his soul—Nor would he retain any thing that should for one moment interfere with his expected bliss—Instantly he went, and made known to Jesus the particular mercy which he desired—He asked not any pecuniary aid,

but

but that, of which the value was above rubies—He had come to one who was able to grant whatever he should ask ; and, as he was not straitened in his benefactor, he would not be straitened in his own petitions—]

Such should be the effect which the calls of Jesus should produce on us

[We should not hesitate one moment to comply with his gracious invitations—Nor should any worldly concerns occupy our thoughts when a prospect of mercy presents itself to our view—We should cast off every thing, however dear or even necessary it may be to us, rather than suffer it to retard our spiritual progress—“ We should lay aside every weight, and the sin that most easily besets us, in order that we may run with patience and activity the race that is set before us ”— Going to Jesus we should spread all our wants before him—If he ask, What wouldst thou that I should do unto thee? we should be ready to reply, Lord, open my eyes, forgive my sins, renew my soul—If we thus improve his calls, we shall never be disappointed of our hope—]

We shall CONCLUDE with recommending to your imitation the conduct of this blind beggar—Imitate

1. His humility

[It is scarcely possible for words to express deeper humility than that manifested by Bartimeus—He sought nothing but mercy for mercy's sake—He had no plea but that of his own misery, together with that which was implied in the appellation given to Jesus—The son of David was to confirm his divine mission by the most benevolent and stupendous miracles—The import of the beggar's petition therefore was, Let *me*, the poorest, meanest, and most necessitous of mankind, be made a monument of thy power and grace—Such exactly is to be the spirit and temper with which we must approach the Lord—If we bring any self-righteous plea, or build our hope upon any thing besides the work and offices of Christ, we never can find acceptance with him—It is the broken and contrite spirit and that alone which God will not despise—]

2. His perseverance

[The circumstances under which he persevered in his requests were very discouraging—He was rebuked by the people, and, to appearance, disregarded by Christ ; yet, instead of relaxing, he redoubled his efforts to obtain mercy—Thus should we pray and not faint—Discouragements we must expect both from without and from within—The world will cry out against us, and God himself may appear to have forsaken us—But we must argue like the lepers, and say, If I cease to call upon him I *must* perish ; and I can but perish if I
continue

continue my supplications—Thus must we continue in prayer with all perseverance; breaking through every difficulty, casting away every impediment, and determining, if we perish, to perish at the feet of Christ—Would to God that there were within us such a spirit!—Sooner should heaven and earth pass away than such a suppliant be finally rejected—]

3. His gratitude

[When healed by Jesus, we find the same contempt for secular interests as he had manifested under his distress—From henceforth his concern was to honour his Benefactor—He instantly became a stated follower of Jesus, a living witness of his mercy and power—How differently did he act from those who seek the Lord in their affliction, but, as soon as ever they are relieved, forget all the vows that are upon them!—Let not us be of this base and odious character—Let us rather yield up ourselves as living sacrifices to the Lord, and devote ourselves wholly to his service—Let the remembrance of his kindness be ever engraven on our hearts, and a grateful sense of it be ever legible in our lives—Thus shall we answer the end for which his mercy is imparted, and be numbered among his followers in a better world—]

CCCXIII. THE FIG-TREE CURSED.

Matt. xxi. 18—22. *Now in the morning, as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig-tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig-tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

THE miracles wrought by our Lord were, for the most part, very different from those which had been performed by the great legislator of the Jews—Those by which Moses confirmed his divine mission were mostly awful and calamitous; but those wrought in vindication of our Lord's authority, were all mild and benevolent, suited to the dispensation which he was sent to introduce—

This, which we have now before us, may seem an exception^a—Yet the injury done (if we may so speak) was small, since the tree was already barren; and the miracle, if it had been duly attended to, might have saved thousands from both temporal and everlasting destruction—We shall

I. Explain the miracle

There is some difficulty with respect to the *literal* meaning of a part of this narration

[The miracle, as related by St. Matthew, is easy to be understood—But St. Mark mentions, That “the time of figs was not yet^b”—This has given occasion to infidels to represent our Lord as looking for figs at a season when, according to the Evangelist’s own confession, there was no probability of finding any—But “the time of figs” refers to the time of *gathering* them; and as *that* time was not yet fully come, there was every reason to expect that the whole crop was yet upon the tree—The fruit of a fig-tree grows at least as early as the leaves; and therefore, as the foliage was luxuriant, there was ground to hope that the fruit also was abundant—This accounts in an easy manner for the disappointment experienced by our Lord; and shews how weak and frivolous are the objections urged by infidels against the truth of our holy religion^c—]

Respecting the *prophetical* meaning of the miracle all are agreed

[The Jews had enjoyed every advantage of care and culture—Yet they constantly disappointed the expectations of their God—They professed themselves indeed to be his peculiar people; but they brought forth no fruit that was suited to that relation—Now therefore God had determined to abandon them to *judicial impenitence*, and *utter desolation*—The speedy effect, which followed from our Lord’s denunciation against the fig-tree, intimated the near approach both of the *spiritual* and *temporal* judgments which were coming on the Jews—And the event answered the prediction—It was but *four days* before

^a That of sending the devils into the herd of swine was rather a *permission* to them to fulfil their own desire, than an actual miracle wrought by our Lord himself.

^b Mark xi. 13.

^c If the words, “*And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves,*” Mark xi. 13. be included in a parenthesis, the sense of the whole will appear at once. The very same writer has expressed himself on another occasion *precisely in a similar manner*, ch. xvi. ver. 3, 4. Inclose the former part of ver. 4. in a parenthesis, and the true meaning of the passage becomes obvious.

before they filled up the measure of their iniquities by crucifying the Lord of glory; and but forty years before the temple and city were finally destroyed—Thus was the fig-tree made a warning to the Jewish nation; and a salutary emblem would it have been, if they had regarded it as they ought—]

Having explained all which is necessary to a just understanding of the miracle, we shall

II. Consider the declarations founded upon it

The former of these relates to his own more immediate disciples

[Being now soon to leave the world, our Lord was studious to support and comfort his disciples—And the surprise, which they expressed at the speedy destruction of the fig-tree, too clearly manifested their low thoughts of his power, and consequently their need of having their faith in him increased—On this account, as it should seem, he made a less obvious improvement of the miracle than he might otherwise have done; and turned that into a ground of comfort, which would more naturally have afforded an occasion of solemn admonition—The disciples, like himself, were to work miracles in confirmation of their word; and greater works than this were to be performed by them—He tells them therefore to exercise faith in God, and to proceed to the performing of the greatest miracles with the most assured confidence, that the effects predicted by them should instantly and infallibly be produced—Thus he prepared them for their future ministrations, and encouraged them to rely on the invisible agency of an Almighty God—]

The latter may be understood in reference to the church at large

[This indeed, like the former, *may* be taken in a limited sense—But it may also be applied to the great body of believers—It accords with many other passages that confessedly relate to all^d—And what encouragement does it, in this view, afford us!—We need never despond on account of any difficulties—Not even mountains of guilt and corruption should cause us to say, There is no hope—The prayer of faith shall bring Omnipotence to our aid—Nor is there any thing promised in the sacred oracles which shall not be given to the believing suppliant—The same almighty power that blasted the fig-tree, shall blast our enemies, and cause, if need be, the very mountains to start from their bases and be buried in the sea—]

From hence we may LEARN

1. The

^d John xiv. 13, 14.

1. The danger of a fruitless profession

[God expects his people to be fruitful in good works—Nor will he acknowledge us as his if we disappoint his expectations—Let us not then be satisfied with the fairest leaves of profession, without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness to his praise and glory—Jesus is assuredly coming soon to inspect us all—He hungers, as it were, after our good fruits—Let us then study to bring forth such, that “our beloved may come into his garden and eat with pleasure^e”—And let us dread lest we provoke him to *make our sin our punishment*, and lest, being “filled with our own ways^f,” our “nakedness appear unto all”—]

2. The true source of all our fruitfulness

[Jesus, in cursing the fig-tree, had nothing to do but to withhold his blessing from it; and instantly it was withered both in root and branch—Its power even to bring forth leaves had been derived from him—Thus if his spirit be taken from us we shall become “twice dead, plucked up by the roots^g”—To him then we must give the glory of all the good that we have been enabled to do; for, “Of him has our fruit been found^h,” and “by his grace alone we are what we are”—“We have nothing which we have not received”—And to him must we look for strength to fulfil his will in future; for, “All our fresh springs are in himⁱ”—]

3. What exalted thoughts we should entertain of Christ's power!

[This was the peculiar improvement which our Lord himself made of his miracle—And alas! what need have we to be continually reminded on this subject!—At every fresh difficulty we are ready to be discouraged, as though he were not able to deliver—And doubtless our unbelief often prevents him from exhibiting his wonders to our view^k—Has he not said that, *If we believe, we shall see the glory of God^l*?—Let us then be “strong in faith, giving glory to God”—Let us never limit the power and grace of Christ, but with unshaken affiance follow the direction he has given us, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and beside me there is none else”—]

^e Song iv. 16.

^f Prov. xiv. 14.

^g Jude 12.

^h Hos. xiv. 8.

ⁱ Ps. xxxvi. 9. and lxxxvii. 7.

^k Matt. xiii. 58.

^l John xi. 40.

CCCXIV. THOSE, WHO CAME TO APPREHEND JESUS,
SMITTEN DOWN BY A WORD.

John xviii. 4—9. *Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth and said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who betrayed him, stood with them. As soon as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me, have I lost none.*

THE cross of Christ has been an offence and a stumbling-block to both Jews and Gentiles in every age: they think it absurd to expect salvation from one, who saved not himself, and life from one who was made subject unto death—But every step of his humiliation was accompanied with circumstances which abundantly attested the dignity of his person, and counterbalanced the ignominy of his low and suffering condition—When he lay in a manger, he was pointed out to the Eastern magi by an extraordinary star; when he agonized in the garden, there came an angel from heaven to strengthen him; and when he was apprehended as a thief, he beat down the whole band of his enemies by a word of his mouth—This miraculous exertion of his power, though not recorded in the other Evangelists, is a very interesting part of our Lord's history: and the account here given of it leads us to notice

I. His successful resistance

Our Lord went forth boldly to meet his enemies

[Many will go forth to face danger, and will manifest great boldness in the midst of it, because they hope to escape the troubles that threaten them, and to overcome the enemies that oppose them—But if they could look into futurity and see the sufferings which they would be called to endure, they would not be so precipitate; they would be glad, if possible, to avoid the evil, especially if they found that their submission to it would entail on them nothing but disgrace—Not so our Lord: “he knew all things that should come upon him:” he had already tasted of the bitter cup, and knew that he was

about to drink it even to the very dregs; he knew all that he should endure from men, from devils, and from his heavenly Father; yet he went forth unappalled, “enduring the cross and despising the shame”—]

He shewed them, however, how vain would be their attempts to apprehend him, if he chose to stand in his own defence

[Enquiring calmly whom they sought, and being told, “Jesus of Nazareth,” he answered, “I am he”—Here were no reproaches (for though reviled, he reviled not again) but a plain acknowledgment that he was the object whom they wanted—But with what a glorious power were his words accompanied!—No sooner were they uttered, than all the band of soldiers, with the chief priests, and scribes, and elders, and Judas at their head, were struck as with lightning, and staggering backward, they fell to the ground—This miracle, though at first sight it may appear vindictive, was, in fact, as replete with mercy as any that Jesus ever wrought—It was calculated to shew them their guilt and danger, and thereby to lead them to repentance—The priests and scribes in particular could scarce fail to call to mind the signal vengeance that had been inflicted on two bands of soldiers who went to apprehend Elijah, and to contrast with that the mercy they had received^a—The recollection of this might have convinced them that they were at this instant monuments of God’s forbearance, and that Christ, if he had chosen, could have struck them all dead upon the spot—Happy would it have been for them if they had indulged such obvious and suitable reflections!—]

But his hour being come, he satisfied himself with merely shewing them what he could do, if he pleased; and that they could no otherwise apprehend him than by

II. His willing surrender

Notwithstanding this most awful warning, they still persisted in their intention to apprehend Jesus

[If the eyes be blinded and the heart hardened, it is in vain to expect any great benefit either from judgments or mercies—Like Pharaoh we may be affected for a moment, but shall soon “return with the dog to his vomit”—No sooner had they recovered a little from their surprise, than they resumed their purpose—But oh! who would have conceived that the ministers of religion should be so employed, and that an apostle too should be found standing in such company, and on such an occasion? Contemplate him one

moment

^a 2 Kings i. 9—14.

moment as rising from the ground, and instantly leading on again the murderous band; what an awful picture of human depravity! Lord, what is man! What a monster of iniquity, if left to follow the dictates of his own heart—]

Our Lord, having thus demonstrated his power to resist, surrendered up himself into their hands

[Our Lord had before affirmed that no man could take away his life, but that he would lay it down of himself^b—Before his hour was come he repeatedly withdrew himself both from injudicious friends and from incensed enemies^c—But now he proceeded to fulfil his word, and willingly gave up himself into the hands of his enemies—As, when first he undertook our cause, he said to the Father, Lo, I come, I delight to do thy will, O God^d; so now, at the close of his undertaking, he went up to his enemies again, and asked, Whom seek ye? and replied again as before to the answer given him—Now he suffered himself to be bound as a criminal, and yielded up himself to all those indignities and miseries, which, as our surety, it became him to endure—This voluntary surrender of himself was necessary in order to his being a sacrifice for us; and it was one principal circumstance that rendered his sacrifice so peculiarly acceptable to God; “He loved us,” says the apostle, “and gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour^e”—]

Nevertheless, even while he thus humbled himself, he further evinced his power by

III. His dignified capitulation

He did not see fit to let his disciples participate yet in his bitter cup

[He had ordained that his disciples should be conformed to him in their death as well as in their life—But they were yet but weak in the faith, and not able to encounter great difficulties—A premature discouragement might prove fatal to them—Our Lord therefore would “not put new wine into old bottles,” or suffer his disciples to be tried beyond their strength—]

On this account he stipulated with his enemies that they should not molest any of his adherents

[He did not make a request to his enemies, for there was no probability that they would listen to it for one moment—He imposed it on them with authority, that they should let his disciples go; and, by his invisible agency, he constrained them to obey him—And so effectual was his command, that they

^b John x. 18.

^d Ps. xl. 7, 8.

^c Luke iv. 29, 30. and John vi. 15.

^e Eph. v. 2.

they could not even retaliate upon Peter whose temerity had exposed both himself and his fellow-disciples to most imminent hazard—Jesus had just before declared to his heavenly Father, that he had preserved all whom the Father had committed to him^f—He was therefore peculiarly solicitous for their welfare in the hour of danger: and shewed that, though he saved not himself, he was both able and determined to save those who had put their trust in him—]

Let us from this history take occasion to view Jesus

1. As a surety for sinners

[What he did on this occasion is precisely what he has done with respect to all the enemies of our salvation—Does the justice of God arrest us, or his holy law condemn us? Behold, Jesus gives up himself in our stead, and says respecting us, Let these go their way—Isaac was not more certainly doomed to death in the purpose of his father, than we were by reason of our iniquities; but Jesus, like the ram, is accepted in our stead, and we rise to a life of immortality and glory—Let us ever view Jesus in this light; let us regard him as our surety and substitute; nor doubt, but that through his willing sacrifice, and authoritative mediation, our souls shall live for ever—]

2. As an avenger of sin

[We have seen what Christ did when he was about to surrender up himself, and to stand as a criminal at man's tribunal: What then will he not do when he shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and summon the universe to *his* tribunal? If an armed band were smitten to the ground by the power of his word in the hour of his deepest humiliation, how shall an individual, unarmed, resist him in the day when he shall sit on his throne of judgment?—When he shall say, “I am he,” whom thou despisedst, “I am he,” whose invitations thou didst slight, and on whose blood thou didst trample; What confusion will cover us! what terror will seize us! and how irresistible will be the power that shall consign us over to perdition! Surely, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”—O let us seek Jesus, not to betray and dishonour him, but to serve and glorify him with our whole hearts—]

3. As a protector of his people

[As his people were beset with enemies at that time, so are they in every age, and every place—Malignant as they were who came to apprehend our Lord, they were but instruments in the hands of that malicious fiend who seeks to destroy us—But all the hosts of hell are as much subject to the
power

^f John xvii. 12.

power of Jesus, as Judas and the soldiers were—"Not any weapon formed against us can prosper," if only we put our trust in him—Let us then flee to him; and he will hide us under the shadow of his wings—As birds flying to protect their young, so will the Lord defend us—And as the attendant angel passed between the destroyer and the houses sprinkled with blood, so will the Lord pass over to preserve us from the assaults of our enemies^e—Let us rely on him, and we shall find him a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall^h—]

^e Isai. xxxi. 5.

^h Isai. xxv. 4.

CCCXV. THE HEALING OF MALCHUS' EAR.

Luke xxii. 50, 51. *And one of them smote the servant of the High Priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered, and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.*

IT is but too common for even good persons, who are of a sanguine temper, to ask instruction or advice, while by their conduct they evince that they have very little disposition to receive and follow it—We do not wonder that Pilate should ask, "What is truth?" and go away before an answer could be given him: but it is grievous to see one of Peter's eminence, who had been favoured with so many opportunities of divine instruction, affecting to seek direction from his Lord, and instantly prosecuting his own unhallowed will—In considering the instance recorded, it will be proper to notice

I. The indiscretion of Peter

Peter, in striking Malchus with the sword, was evidently actuated by a love to his Master, and a zeal for his service—Yet his mode of discovering his affection was certainly deserving of blame—It argued

1. A want of Christian temper

[Christianity does not preclude men from taking the sword in defence of their country, when called to it by imperious necessity, and authorized by the civil magistrates: but it enjoins individuals rather to suffer patiently the persecutions with which they are assaulted, and gladly to endure the loss of all things, even of life itself, for the Gospel sake—As for
taking

taking up arms *against* the civil power, it is an extremity which perhaps not any thing can justify—Yet this is the very thing that Peter did; and as he did it without any express command, he was rebuked by our Lord, and told that “all, who should take the sword in that manner, however they might think they were fighting the Lord’s battles, should perish with the sword^a—”]

2. An ignorance of the prophetic writings

[It had been foretold that “one, who had eaten bread with our Lord, should lift up his heel against him;” and that, in consequence of his treachery, he should be “led like a lamb to the slaughter,” and “be numbered with transgressors”—Had Peter fully understood those prophecies he would not so rudely have contradicted our Lord on a former occasion^b, or so impetuously defended him on this; but would have submitted to the will of God, saying, “The cup which his Father hath given him shall he not drink it?”—]

3. A forgetfulness of our Lord’s character

[Often, yea, but a few minutes before, had Peter seen his Lord performing the most stupendous miracles^c—If these had been wrought by the Father’s power, could not Christ call upon him now, and have more than seventy thousand angels sent for his defence? If Christ wrought them by his own power, could he not deliver himself out of their hands without Peter’s interposition? But if Christ were abandoned by his Father, and reduced to a state of impotence himself, could Peter protect him against a band of armed men? Was not his furious assault rather calculated to increase their rage, and to make them destroy Jesus and all his disciples upon the spot?—In every view his conduct was wrong; for if his aid was needed, it was insufficient; and if it was not needed, it was officiously and imprudently obtruded—]

The contrast between Christ’s conduct and Peter’s will appear by considering

II. The remedy which our Lord applied

Jesus would give no just occasion of offence to the civil magistrate, and therefore set himself instantly to remedy the evil that had been committed

[Peter had cut off the ear of the high priest’s servant, probably because he was most active and forward in apprehending our Lord. But Jesus would not suffer even that small injury to be sustained on his account: he therefore “touched” the wound,

^a Our Lord in his answer to Peter pointed out the various sources of his misconduct.—See Matt. xxvi. 52—54.

^b Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

^c John xviii. 5—11.

wound, and restored the ear to its perfect state—What a marvellous return was this for all the indignities which this miscreant had offered him!—If Jesus had chosen to work a miracle on this occasion, one would rather have expected that it should be such an one, as should make the “ears of all that heard of it to tingle:” but mercy was his delight; and the more unworthy the objects of his mercy were, the more did he glory in displaying “the unsearchable riches of his grace” — — — Would one not at least hope that this miracle should disarm his enemies, and make them desist from their purpose? But, alas! nothing can prevail with those who are given up to judicial blindness^d — — — The manner of working the miracle was scarcely less remarkable than the miracle itself: for he not only performed it unsolicited, but even asked permission to perform it; saying to those who were binding him, “Suffer ye thus far,” “loosen my hands for one moment, that I may exercise them in one more act of benevolence before your eyes.” What astonishing meekness and condescension! — — — Thus, while he more than recompensed the injury that Peter’s indiscretion had occasioned, he shewed to his enemies, that his surrender of himself was voluntary; and left to his people a most perfect pattern for their conduct when persecuted by an ungodly world—]

From this history we may LEARN

1. To guard against an indiscreet unhallowed zeal

[Zeal properly directed is amiable and praiseworthy^e: but a “zeal without knowledge” is most injurious to the Christian cause—Paul’s conduct in his unconverted state, and the request of two of our Lord’s disciples, may serve to put us on our guard against the fatal mistakes into which even good men may fall^f—Let our zeal be ever tempered with love, and regulated by the holy scriptures; else, while it carries us too far on some occasions, it will prove, like Peter’s, miserably defective upon others^g—]

2. To exercise love towards our most inveterate enemies

[The Christian’s “weapons are not to be carnal,” nor must he “war after the flesh”—He is to “turn the right cheek to him that smites him on the left,” and, by rendering good for evil, to “heap coals of fire on the head of his enemies.” “Instead of being overcome of evil, he is to overcome

^d *e. g.* Pharaoh was alike uninfluenced by judgments or mercies.

^e Gal. iv. 18.

^f Gal. i. 13. Luke ix. 54.

^g Mark xiv. 71. Such persons are compared to “a cake not turned,” which, instead of being equally penetrated with heat, is burnt up on one side, and scarcely warmed on the other. See Hos. vii. 8.

come evil with good^h—Christians, see if this be your conduct— — — And remember that “Christ set you an example that you should follow his stepsⁱ” —]

3. To trust in Christ for the healing of the wounds which sin has made

[No sword can inflict so deep a wound as sin has made— It were a light matter if it had merely killed the body: it has inflicted a mortal wound on our souls—But Jesus can heal us; nor should any sense of unworthiness prevent our application to him—Let us go to him, and he will add us to the number of those whom he has made monuments of his almighty power and his unbounded mercy— — —]

^h Rom. xii. 19—21.

ⁱ 1 Pet. ii. 20—23.

CCCXVI. CHRIST THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

John xi. 25, 26. *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.*

IN great and long continued afflictions, we are apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. But, whatever be his intention with respect to the ungodly, we are sure that he designs nothing but good to his own peculiar people, even when he appears most regardless of their supplications. There are two ends which he invariably proposes to himself in his dispensations towards them; namely, the brighter revelation of his own glory, and the fuller manifestation of it to their souls.

In the history before us we have an account of a heavy affliction that had befallen a family, through the death of one, to whom Jesus had shewn a very peculiar attachment. He had been solicited to come and help them; but he had delayed his visit till the sick person had been dead four days. This however, though liable to misconstruction, he had done intentionally, in order that he might manifest more fully to the disconsolate sisters his own power and glory. Accordingly, when they intimated their persuasion, that, if he would pray to God for the restoration of their brother to life, God would grant his request,

request, he told them that he needed not beseech God to effect it; for that he himself was the resurrection and the life; and was able to impart either bodily or spiritual life to whomsoever he would.

In considering this most remarkable declaration, we shall notice

I. That part which relates to himself

Martha having, in conformity with the prevailing opinion of the Jews, expressed her expectation of a general resurrection at the last day, Jesus says to her

“ I am the resurrection ”

[Our Lord, in his divine nature, possessed omnipotence necessarily, and of himself. In his mediatorial capacity he was invested with it by his Father, agreeably to the plan concerted in the divine counsels. To him who had undertaken to procure salvation for a fallen world, was delegated all power requisite for the full discharge of that office. The restoring of his people to a new and heavenly life after death, was essential to their complete salvation: this therefore was committed to him^a; and he both declared he would execute this great work^b, and gave an earnest of its accomplishment in raising himself from the dead^c.]

“ I am the life ”

[In this term our Lord proceeds further than in the former, and asserts, that as he is the author and first-fruits of the resurrection, so is he the very principle of life whereby his people live. This might indeed be collected from many figurative expressions of scripture, which represent him as the fountain of life to all his people^d: but we are not left to gather such an important truth from mere parables; it is asserted frequently in the plainest terms: he is a quickening spirit^e, that liveth in us^f, and is our very life^g. He is to the soul, what the soul is to the body; he pervades, animates, and invigorates all our spiritual faculties: by his secret energy our understanding is enabled to apprehend divine truth, and our will inclined to obey it: and, without him, the soul would be as dead as the body without the soul.]

Let us now prosecute our enquiries into

II. That which respects his people

There is a remarkable correspondence between the
two

^a John v. 21, 25—29.

^c John x. 18. 1 Cor. xv. 20.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 45.

^g Col. iii. 4.

^b John vi. 39, 40.

^d John xv. 1. Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^f John x v. 6. and vi. 57. and

Gal. ii. 20.

two latter, and the two former clauses of the text; the latter declaring the operation of the powers expressed in the former.

1. As being "the resurrection," he will raise the bodies of his people

[Judging of things according to our weak reason, we are ready to think that the restoration of bodies, which may have undergone so many changes, is impossible. But cannot he who formed the universe out of nothing, collect the atoms that constitute our identity, and reunite them to their kindred souls? He can, and will; yea, that very Jesus, who died upon the cross, has the keys of death and of hell^b, and will effect this by his own almighty power¹.

This clause might further intimate, that by the first act of faith in him our souls should be made partakers of spiritual life. And this would accord with other passages of scripture^k, and prepare us for the next clause, which, rising in a climax, declares the benefits that shall result from a continued life of faith upon him.]

2. As being "the life," he will preserve the souls of his people unto everlasting life

[The bodies of the saints must undergo the sentence denounced against sin¹; (though death to *them* is scarcely worthy the name death; it is rather a sleep, from which they shall be awakened at the morning of the resurrection^m) but their souls shall never die: none shall prevail against themⁿ; none shall pluck them out of Christ's hands^o; their life is hid in him beyond the reach of men or devils^p; the vital principle within them is an ever-living seed^q, an over-flowing fountain^r: as long as Christ liveth, they shall live also^s. The separation that will take place between their souls and bodies will only introduce them to a higher state of existence, which they shall enjoy until the day that their bodies shall be awakened from their slumbers, to participate and enhance their bliss.]

We must not however fail to notice the description given of those to whom these promises are made

[*Twice*, in these few words, are these blessings limited to believers: not because our Lord disregards good works, or because they shall not be rewarded; but because we cannot do any good work unless we first receive strength from Christ by faith^t; and because, if we obtained life by working, we should have

^b Rev. i. 18.

^k John vi, 33, 35, and vii. 38. and x. 10.

^m Ver. 11. Acts vii. 60. 1 Thess. iv. 14.

ⁿ John x. 28.

^o 1 Pet. i. 23.

^s John xiv. 19.

¹ Phil. iii. 21.

¹ Rom. viii. 10.

ⁿ Isai. liv. 17.

^p Col. iii. 3.

^r John iv. 14.

^t John xv. 5.

have whereof to glory before God : and God has decreed that no flesh shall glory in his presence, and that we shall glory only in the Lord^u. It must never be forgotten that God has caused all fulness to dwell in his Son, Jesus Christ^x; and that we must, by a continued exercise of faith, receive out of that fulness grace for grace^y. It is by faith that we live^z, we stand^a, we walk^b, we are saved^c: in a word, "God has given us eternal life; but this life is *in his Son*: he therefore that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life^d."]

The pointed interrogation with which our Lord closed this address to Martha, directs us how to IMPROVE this subject : it suggests to us

1. That all persons, however eminent in their profession, or decided in their character, ought to "examine themselves whether they be in the faith"

[It was to one whom he knew to be an humble and faithful disciple, that Jesus put this question : well therefore may we who are of more doubtful character, consider it as addressed to us; "Believest thou this?" Believest thou that Christ is the only fountain of life; and that there is no way of receiving life from him but by faith? And dost thou believe these things, not in a mere speculative manner (for *that* many do whose souls are dead before God) but in such a way as to reduce them to practice? The believing of this record forms the one line of distinction between those that shall be saved, and those that shall perish. If we truly receive it, we have already passed from death unto life^e: if we do not receive it, we are yet dead in trespasses and sins : we have not life now; we cannot have life hereafter. A resurrection indeed we shall partake of; but it is a resurrection to damnation, and not a resurrection to life^f: we shall live; but it will be a life justly denominated death, the second death^g. Let us not then defer our enquiries into a subject which is of such infinite importance.]

2. That the believing of this record is the most effectual antidote against the troubles of life, or the fears of death

[If Martha had felt the full influence of these truths, she would have moderated her sorrows, under the persuasion that her loss was her brother's gain; and that, if her brother were
not

^u Rom. iii. 27. Eph. ii. 8, 9. 1 Cor. i. 29—31.

^x Col. i. 19.

^y John i. 16.

^z Gal. iii. 11.

^a 2 Cor. i. 24.

^b 2 Cor. v. 7.

^c Gal. ii. 16.

^d 1 John v. 11, 12.

^e John v. 24.

^f Ib. 29.

^g Rev. xx. 14.

not restored to life, she should soon meet him in a better world. Thus in every state the consideration of these truths will afford to us also unspeakable consolation: for if we believe in Christ, and have through him the possession of spiritual, and the prospect of eternal life, what cause can we have to complain; what cause to fear? The world will be divested of its allurements, and death of its terrors. Satisfied that all events are under the control of our best friend, we shall commit them cheerfully to his wise disposal; and looking forward to the day in which he will call us from our graves, we shall expect his summons with composure at least, if not also with a holy impatience. Let us then live by faith in our divine Saviour, assured that he will keep us unto eternal life, and exalt us, both in body and soul, unto the everlasting enjoyment of his presence and glory.]

CCCXVII. CHRIST'S ASCENSION TO GLORY.

Heb. i. 3. *Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*

A REVELATION of God, by whatever means or instrument it may be communicated, demands our solemn attention. But Christianity requires the highest possible degree of reverence, because the messenger, by whom it was promulgated, as far surpassed all other instruments in excellence, as the truths delivered by him are of deeper and more mysterious import. It is in this view that the apostle introduces this sublime description of Christ; in which we may notice

I. The dignity of his person

We cannot conceive any expressions more grand than these which are here applied to Christ, and which set forth

1. His essential dignity

[The Father is the fountain, and the archetype of all perfection. Of him Jesus is a perfect copy. As the impression on the wax corresponds with all the marks and lineaments of the seal, so is Jesus "the express image" of the Father in every particular, insomuch that "he who hath seen him hath

seen the Father^a." But the Father is, in himself, invisible to mortal eyes^b; it is in Christ only that he is seen: on which account Christ is called "the image of the invisible God^c." And as all the glory of the sun is seen in the bright effulgence of its rays, so is all the glory of the godhead seen in the face of Jesus Christ^d.]

2. His official dignity

[It was Jesus who made the worlds^e: and he it is who upholds them by the same "powerful word" that first spake them into existence^f. By him all things maintain their proper courses, and the order first assigned them. Nor is there any thing that happens either in the kingdom of providence or of grace, which does not proceed from his will, or tend to his glory. There is nothing so great but it is under his control, nothing so small but it occupies his attention^g. Every thing that is good owes its existence to his immediate agency, and every thing that is evil, to his righteous permission.]

Intimately connected with this is

II. The diversity of his ministrations.

As in the church there are "diversities of administrations and of operations^h" under Christ, who is the author of them, so in the work of Christ himself there is a diversity of ministrations.

1. He "purged our sins" by his blood on earth

[Sin needed an atonement, and such an atonement as no created being could offer. Jesus therefore, the Creator himself, undertook to make an atonement for us, and such an one as should satisfy divine justice on our behalf, and put honour on that law which we had violated. For this end he assumed that nature which had sinned, and endured the curse due to our iniquities. When he had only to create or to uphold the universe, his *word* was sufficient: but when he came to redeem the world, nothing would suffice but his own precious *blood*. Other priests offered the blood of bulls and of goats as typical expiations: but, to make a true and proper atonement, Jesus was forced to offer up "*himself*." His prayers and tears were insufficient: if he would purge away our sins, he must do it "by himself," by the "pouring out his soul unto death."

This is what Jesus undertook to do; nor did he ever draw back till he could say, "It is finished."] He

^a John xiv. 9.

^c Col. i. 15.

^e Ver. 2. and John i. 3.

^f Matt. x. 23, 30.

^b 1 Tim. i. 17. and vi. 16.

^d Col. ii. 9. 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^g Col. i. 17.

^h 1 Cor. xii. 4—6.

2. He ascended to complete his work in heaven

[The high priest, after offering the sacrifice, entered within the veil, to present it there. Thus Jesus "passed into the heavens," the place where he was to finish his ministrations. In the presence of all his disciples he ascended thither, giving thereby a decisive evidence that nothing further remained for him to do on earth. But a further evidence of this arises from the posture in which he ministers in heaven. The priests under the law *stood*, because they needed to repeat the same sacrifices continually: but Jesus having offered one sacrifice once for all, "*sat down* at the right hand" of God, the place of supreme dignity and power. From this we infer the perfection of his sacrifice on earthⁱ; and are assured, that whatever remains to be done by him within the veil, is transacted in an authoritative manner, all power being given to him to "save to the uttermost" them that trust in him.]

We may LEARN from hence

1. The security of them that believe in Christ

[Who is it that interests himself for them? "Jehovah's fellow^k." Who bought them with his blood? The God of heaven and earth^l. Who has undertaken to keep them? He that "upholdeth all things by his word^m." Who is continually engaged in completing their salvation? He that is constituted head over all things for this very purposeⁿ. What then have they to fear either from their past guilt, or their present weakness? Let them only be strong in faith, and "none shall ever pluck them out of his hand^o."]]

2. The danger of those who are yet in unbelief

In proportion to the dignity of this adorable Saviour must be the guilt of rejecting him. This is frequently insisted on in this epistle^p. Let us lay it to heart. To neglect this Jesus is such a mixture of folly and ingratitude, of impiety and rebellion, as involves in it the highest degree of criminality, and subjects us to the heaviest condemnation^q. Let those who are guilty of this neglect remember that "the enemies of Jesus shall all become his footstool:" and let them kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish without a remedy^r.]

ⁱ Heb. x. 11, 12.

^l Acts xx. 28.

ⁿ Eph. i. 22, 23.

^p Ch. ii. 3, 4. & x. 28, 29.

^k Zech. xiii. 7.

^m Col. i. 17, 18.

^o John x. 28.

^q Deut. xviii. 18, 19.

^r Ps. ii. 6, 9, 10, 12.

CCCXVIII. CHRIST'S EXERCISE OF SUPREME POWER
OVER THE INVISIBLE WORLD.

Rev. i. 17, 18. *Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

MAN, while he continued in a state of innocence, communed freely with his Maker face to face: but from the time that sin entered into the world, he has dreaded the presence of the Most High, and fled from it with fear and trembling. Whenever God has been pleased to appear to any of his people, the sight has uniformly filled them with terror; and, in some instances, almost deprived them even of life. This was the effect produced by a vision vouchsafed to John. Our blessed Lord, in a habit somewhat resembling that of the high priest, revealed himself to his beloved disciple: and so august was his appearance, that John, unable to endure the sight, fell at his feet as dead. But our Lord, in condescension to his weakness, dispelled his fears by making known to him the perfections of his nature, and the offices which in his mediatorial capacity he sustained.

In discoursing on his words we shall consider

I. Our Lord's record concerning himself

A more glorious description of Jesus is not to be found in all the sacred writings: he declares himself to be

1. The eternal God

[The terms, "the first and the last," are intended to express eternity^a: and, in this view, it is an incommunicable attribute of Jehovah. It is often used to describe God in places where he contrasts himself with the gods of the heathen^b: and it always characterizes him as infinitely superior to all creatures. But Jesus here arrogates it to himself. Eternity had been ascribed to him both by prophets and apostles^c: but he here claims it himself as his own prerogative; for, notwithstanding he was in the form of a servant, he thought it not robbery to be equal with God^d. Hence then it is evident that Jesus is one with the Father, "in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal," God over all, blessed for evermore^e.]

2. The

^a Ver. 8, 11. and Rev. xxii. 13.

^b Isai. xlv. 6.

^c Prov. viii. 22—30. Mic. v. 2. John i. 1. Heb. xiii. 8.

^d Phil. ii. 6.

^e Rom. ix. 5.

2. The living Saviour

[He, whose brightness now exceeded that of the meridian sun, once hung upon the cross. But, says he, "though^f I was dead, yet I am the living One^g, possessed of life in myself^h, and the source of life to others; and immutably living, to carry on the work which I began on earth." "Behold" this with wonder, yet with a full assurance of its truth; for I, the "Amen," "the true and faithful witness, declare it unto thee." Now as the former assertion shews us what he was in his divine nature, this informs us what he is in his mediatorial office. "He died for our offences, and rose again for our justification;" and is, not only our advocate with the Fatherⁱ, but the head of vital influence to all that believe^k.]

3. The universal Sovereign

[By "hell" we are to understand, not the habitation of the damned only, but the whole invisible world: and "death" is the door of introduction to it. Now to "have the keys" of these, is to have the power over them, together with the entire appointment of men's states in reference to them^l. And this power does Jesus exercise. Whomsoever he will, and in whatever time or manner he sees fit, he consigns to death, and fixes instantly in heaven or hell: "He openeth and no man shutteth; he shutteth, and no man openeth^m." Hence it appears that every event in this world also must be under his control; and consequently, that he is the universal sovereign.]

From the encouraging address which accompanied this record, we are led to consider

II. Its tendency to comfort and support the soul

When a similar vision was vouchsafed to Daniel, its effects, which were also similar, were counteracted in the same mannerⁿ. Now this record of our Lord was well calculated to dissipate the fears of John; and may well also be a comfort to us

1. Under apprehensions of temporal calamities

[Impending dangers and distresses will often excite terror, and overwhelm the soul with anxious dread. But what ground of fear can he have, who has the eternal God for his refuge? What injury can arise to him, whose soul is in the Redeemer's hands, and for whose benefit all things are ordered both in heaven and earth? "Not a hair of his head can perish" but by special commission from his best friend. "Thousands may fall

^f Καὶ.ⁱ Rom. viii. 34.^m Rev. iii. 7.^g Ὁ ζῶν.^k Eph. i. 22, 23.^h John v. 26.^l Isai. xxii. 22.ⁿ Dan. x. 5—12.

fall beside him, and ten thousand at his right hand;” but “no weapon that is formed against him, can prosper.” If his eyes were opened to behold his real situation, he might see himself encompassed with horses of fire, and chariots of fire °: and, standing as in an impregnable fortress, he might defy the assaults of men or devils. If his God and Saviour be for him, none can be against him^p.]

2. Under fears of eternal condemnation

[No man can reflect upon his own character without feeling that he deserves the wrath of God: and every one that is sensible of his own demerits, must tremble lest the judgments he has deserved should be inflicted on him. Yet a just view of the Saviour may dispel his fears, and cause him to “rejoice with joy unspeakable.” Does his guilt appear too great to be forgiven? He that offered an atonement for it, is the eternal God^q. Do doubts arise respecting his acceptance with the Father? Behold, that very Jesus who made atonement for him, ever liveth to plead it as his advocate, and to present it before the mercy-seat^r. Do death and hell appal him with their terrors? they are altogether subject to the control of Jesus, whose power and faithfulness are pledged for the salvation of all his ransomed people^s. To the weakest then we say in the name of this adorable Saviour, “Fear not;” though thou art “a worm, thou shalt thresh the mountains^t;” and though thou art the smallest grain that has been gathered from the field, thou shalt be treasured safely in the granary of thy heavenly Father^u.]

APPLICATION

[We cannot conclude the subject without applying it to those who are ignorant of Christ. Surely we must not say to you “Fear not;” but rather, “Fear and tremble,” for he whom ye have despised, is the eternal God; and ever liveth to put down his enemies, and to make them his footstool. He has only, as it were, to turn the key of the invisible world, and your souls will be locked up in the prison, from whence there is no redemption. O consider this, ye that live unmindful of this adorable Saviour; and prostrate yourselves at his feet, while his offers of mercy are yet extended to you.]

° 2 Kings vi. 17.

^q Acts xx. 28.

^s John x. 28, 29.

^p Rom. viii. 31.

^r 1 John i. 1, 2.

^t Isai. xli. 10, 14, 15.

^u Amos ix. 9.

CCCXIX. THE USE AND INTENT OF OUR LORD'S
MIRACLES.

John xx. 30, 31. *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

THOUGH the miracles which are recorded in the gospel are very numerous, yet are they few in comparison of those which were wrought by our blessed Lord. If all that he performed were distinctly related with all their attendant circumstances, St. John tells us, in the hyperbolical language of the east, that the whole world would scarcely be able to contain the books that would be written^a—Some however are transmitted to posterity as a specimen of the rest, in order that we may be assured of Christ's divine mission, and be led to believe in him to the salvation of our souls.

The Evangelist, stating both the immediate and the ultimate end for which his gospel was written, declares, that the assuring us of Christ's divine mission was

I. The immediate end

Our blessed Lord declared himself to be “ the Christ, the Son of God ”

[It was not in the character of a common prophet that our Lord appeared; he assumed to himself titles to which no human being had aspired, and declared himself to be the Son of God, the incarnate Deity; the Saviour of the world^b——]

For the conviction of the people he wrought unnumbered miracles

[Miracles are works contrary to the common course of nature, works which God alone is able to perform. Hence, when wrought in confirmation of any point, they are justly considered as authenticating that which they are intended to support; because they prove a divine concurrence; and

^a John xxi. 25.

^b His enemies themselves accused him of affecting equality with God; and finding, from the very defence that he made, that they were right in their conjecture, they again sought to put him to death as a blasphemer. John v. 18. and x. 33, 38, 39.

and we cannot suppose that God should enable any man to work miracles merely to establish falsehood, and to deceive his people.

There have indeed been sorceries and enchantments practised, perhaps also miracles, in support of error^c. But, in the case alluded to, God suffered Satan to exercise extraordinary powers in order to harden him who obstinately opposed his will, and to confirm him in the delusions which he had chosen for himself^d. Yet in those instances did he give abundant proof of his own superiority, and leave the confounded monarch without excuse^e.

That the miracles which Jesus did, were intended to convince the Jews of his divine mission, and that they were sufficient for that end, is manifest from the appeal which he himself repeatedly made to them in this very view^f. The completion of prophecy was indeed a decisive proof of his messiahship to those who could compare the prophecies with the events; but the working of miracles afforded a short, compendious, and incontestible evidence to the eyes of all who beheld them.]

For the conviction of *future ages* these miracles were *recorded*

[If there had been no written documents of the things that were transacted, we could not have been sure that our information respecting them was correct; seeing that many variations must inevitably happen in traditions handed down through so many succeeding ages. But when the miracles of our Lord were recorded by persons who were eye-witnesses of the same, and these records were speedily circulated amongst myriads who also had been spectators of them; and when in these very writings an appeal was made to the bitterest enemies of our Lord, who would have been glad enough to contradict the assertions of the Evangelists on a supposition they had been false; these records come down to us with an evidence not at all inferior to ocular demonstration: and if any man reject the testimony which is thus sanctioned both by friends and enemies, he is wilfully blind, and would reject any other evidence that could be given him^g.]

But

^c Exod. vii. 10, 11. ^d Isai. lxvi. 4. Ps. ix. 16. Exod. vii. 3, 13, 14.

^e Aaron's rod swallowed up all the rods of the sorcerers, ib. ver. 12. The sorcerers were permitted to bring calamities on the land, but not to remove them, ib. ver. 21, 22. and viii. 6, 7. And they themselves were constrained to acknowledge a divine power working by Moses and Aaron, when they could no longer imitate the miracles wrought by them, Exod. viii. 18, 19.

^f John v. 36. and xiv. 11.

^g Luke xvi. 31.

But though this was the immediate intent of these written memorials, the salvation of our souls was

II. The ultimate end

Merely to prove to us that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, would have been a fruitless task, unless our believing of that record would conduce to our benefit. But the apostle knew, that our whole salvation depends upon it; and therefore, in transmitting an account of our Saviour's miracles, he sought to bring us to the enjoyment of

1. Spiritual life

[The unbeliever is "dead in trespasses and sins ^h:" he is as incapable of spiritual exertion, as dry bones, that have been entombed for many years, are of exercising the functions belonging to the body ⁱ. Nor is it by working, that he is to obtain life (for he must have life before he can work aright) but by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. By believing, he becomes united to Christ, as a cyon that is grafted into a new stock; and he derives life from him, as a branch does from the tree, or as a member from the head ^k. No sooner is that union formed, than he becomes a new creature ^l; "he is passed from death unto life ^m;" and is "purged from dead works to serve the living God." For the sake of Christ he is made "a partaker of the divine nature ⁿ:" "Christ himself lives in him," and "is that very life ^o," whereby he is enabled to live to God.]

2. Eternal life

[The life begun on earth, is not like the natural life that shall soon expire; it is an incorruptible seed, an immortal principle, that shall flourish in heaven for evermore. The soul that is quickened by faith in Jesus, has also its iniquities forgiven. It stands immediately in the nearest relation to the Deity. The believer is a child of God, an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ ^p. A throne is prepared for him in heaven: and, on his dismissal from the body, he shall be exalted to an eternal participation of the divine glory.

Now this is the object which the Evangelists had in view, when they recorded the miracles of our Lord. They endeavoured to convince us, that Jesus was the Christ; yet not merely to extort from us a speculative assent to this truth, but

^h Eph. ii. 1.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 17. Eph. iv. 15, 16.

^m John v. 24.

^o Gal. ii. 20. Col. iii. 4.

ⁱ Ezek. xxxvii. 4.

^l 2 Cor. v. 17.

ⁿ 2 Pet. i. 4.

^p John i. 12.

to make us rely on him as our Saviour, that we might experience the true "end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls." This was an end worthy the inspired writers, an end, which has already in myriads of instances been accomplished, though its success hitherto has been only as the drop before the shower.]

INFER

1. How should we value the holy scriptures !

[All the books that ever were written are of no value when compared with the sacred volume. In the scriptures, we not only think, but know, that we have eternal life⁹. They testify of Christ: they declare him to be our incarnate God, our all-sufficient propitiation, our everliving advocate, our almighty friend. He is no longer sojourning with us on earth; but we may see him, hear him, converse with him, and enjoy the most intimate fellowship with him, in his word. In that word we may find abundance to confirm our faith, to enliven our hope, to direct our feet, to answer every purpose which our hearts can wish. Let us then "search the scriptures:" let our meditation be upon them: let them be "sweeter to us than honey and the honey-comb:" let them be "esteemed by us more than our necessary food."]

2. How careful should we be to exercise faith on Christ!

[All our knowledge even of the scriptures themselves will be of little use to us, unless we be possessed of a living faith: they will indeed "make us wise unto salvation;" but then it is "*through faith in Christ Jesus*"^r. More *can* not be said, and less *must* not, respecting the excellency of faith, than what is spoken in the words of our text. Every thing relating to spiritual or eternal life must be received by faith, and maintained by faith. In heaven this principle will be superseded; but till we arrive at those happy mansions, we must "walk by faith," and "live altogether by faith on the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us."

Let us then read the scriptures, in order to increase and confirm our faith: let even the strongest believer improve them to this end^s; and in due time he shall be where faith is lost in sight, and hope in enjoyment.]

⁹ John v. 39.

^r 2 Tim. iii. 15.

^s 1 John v. 13.

CONCLUSION.

CCCXX. THE GREAT MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

1 Tim. iii. 16. *Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*

IT has been often said by infidels, that, where mystery begins, religion ends. But, if this were true, there would be no uniformity or consistency in the works of God. All his works both of creation and providence are full of mysteries: there is not any one substance, of which we know *all* the properties, or any one event, for which we can assign *all* the reasons. If then there were nothing in religion above the comprehension of man, it would afford a strong presumption, that our religion was not from heaven: for why should it be revealed, if man could have devised it without a revelation? But the inspired writers represent the gospel as “the wisdom of God in a mystery^a,” as “a mystery hid from ages^b,” and “kept secret from the foundation of the world^c;” they speak of many of its fundamental doctrines as a mystery^d, a great mystery^e, a gloriously rich mystery^f; and of its ministers as “stewards of the mysteries of God^g.” In the words before us, many of the principal events, relating to Christ and the establishment of his religion in the world, are enumerated, and confessedly declared to be a “great mystery.” Let us then contemplate them in their order, and enter with deepest reverence into the investigation of them

I. “God was manifest in the flesh”

[It was not a mere creature that took upon him our nature, but God himself, as the scriptures both of the Old^h and New Testamentⁱ uniformly assert. He had for many ages manifested himself in the Shechinah, the bright cloud that first abode upon the tabernacle, and afterwards resided in the

most

^a 1 Cor. ii. 7.

^b Col. i. 26.

^c Rom. xvi. 25.

^d 1 Cor. xv. 51.

^e Eph. i. 9. and v. 32.

^f Col. i. 27.

^g 1 Cor. iv. 1.

^h Isai. ix. 6. and vii. 14. with Matt. i. 23.

ⁱ John i. 1. Rom. ix. 5. Phil. ii. 6. John x. 30.

most holy place of the temple: but at the appointed time he assumed our very nature, with all its sinless infirmities, into a real union with himself, and dwelt substantially on earth in the person of Jesus Christ^k.

What an astonishing mystery was this! that the Creator of all things should become a creature, and that the infinitely *holy* God should be made “in the likeness of *sinful* flesh^l!” Let us incessantly adore him for this his ineffable condescension, his incomprehensible love.]

II. He was “justified in (or *by*) the Spirit”

[So deep was the humiliation of Christ throughout the whole period of his sojourning on earth, that he needed the most signal evidences from heaven to justify his pretensions, and to vindicate his character from the charges of blasphemy and imposture. The office of justifying him was committed to the Holy Spirit, who visibly interposed on many occasions to attest his divine mission. When our Lord submitted to baptism, and thereby seemed to acknowledge himself a sinner, who needed to be washed in the laver of regeneration, the Spirit bore witness to him as God’s beloved Son, and as the spotless Lamb that was to take away the sin of the world^m. When he was accounted a deceiver, and a confederate with the devil, the Spirit enabled him to work the most stupendous miracles in proof of his being the true Messiahⁿ. When he was dead, and imprisoned in the grave, so that his very disciples thought they had been deceived by him, the Spirit raised him from the dead^o, and thereby declared him to be the Son of God with power^p. And when Christ had, as it were, stated the whole credit of his Messiahship on the descent of the Holy Spirit after his own ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit did descend according to his word, and not only rested visibly on the apostles, but endowed them with power to speak divers languages, and to confirm their word with signs following^q.

And is not this a mystery, that God should reduce himself to such an abject state as to need these attestations to his character; and that the Third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity should be thus necessitated, as it were, to “glorify him,” in order to counterbalance the offence which his humiliation had excited^r ?]

III. He was “seen of angels”

[The angels had beheld his face, and had worshipped before his throne from the first moment of their existence: but when

^k Col. ii. 9.

^m John i. 29—34.

^o 1 Pet. iii. 18.

^q John xv. 26. Acts ii. 3, 4. Heb. ii. 4.

^l Rom. viii. 3.

ⁿ Matt. xii. 24, 25.

^p Rom. i. 4.

^r John xvi. 7—11, 14.

when he became incarnate, they had views of him, which, before that period, they could not have conceived. How did they exult when they saw him an helpless babe lying in a manger^s! But what different feelings must have been excited in their breasts, when they beheld him conflicting with Satan in the wilderness, and sinking under the load of his Father's wrath in the garden of Gethsemane, and in both seasons needing their friendly aid^t! Nothing is spoken of their viewing him on the cross; but doubtless they, who had been so deeply interested about him from his very birth to the hour of his crucifixion, could not but gaze upon him with astonishment and sympathy in his expiring moments. And how gladly did they obey the mandate to confound his adversaries, and to rescue him from the tomb^u! With what joy did they attest his resurrection^x, and wait upon him in his ascension to the highest heavens^y, and announce his intention to return again, in like manner as he had ascended, to judge the world^z!

It is perhaps to these testimonies which the angels bore to Jesus, rather than to the mere circumstances of their seeing him, that the apostle alludes in the words of our text. And surely, if it be mysterious, that the Spirit of God should bear testimony to him, it is no less a mystery, that his own creatures should be employed in such an office.]

IV. He was "preached unto the Gentiles, and believed on" by them

[The Jews, who had for two thousand years been the peculiar people of God, could not conceive that any but their own nation should be admitted to the divine favour: and indeed, to such a degree were the Gentiles immersed in ignorance and sin, that they seemed as if they were utterly excluded from the hope of mercy. But "God's thoughts were not as man's thoughts, or his ways as man's ways:" for, by his express appointment, the gospel was preached to all nations, and salvation through Christ was proclaimed to every creature. The apostle himself had been the honoured instrument of conveying this mercy to them; and had the happiness of seeing, that he had not laboured in vain, or run in vain. There were multitudes in every place who received the word with all readiness of mind, and rested all their hopes of salvation on their incarnate God. Their prejudices vanished; their passions were overcome; and their whole souls were subdued to the obedience of faith.

And

^s Luke ii. 12—14.

^u Matt. xxviii. 2—4.

^y Ps. lxxviii. 17, 18.

^t Matt. iv. 11. Luke xxii. 43.

^x Ib. ver. 5, 6.

^z Acts i. 10, 11.

And were not these things also mysterious, that the poor idolatrous Gentiles should have such glad tidings proclaimed to them; and that he, who had not saved himself, should be regarded as the Saviour of the whole world?

V. He “was received up into glory”

[The return of Jesus to his heavenly mansions is generally thought to be here referred to: but perhaps the reference rather is to the glorious reception which he met with among those who believed on him^a: they did not merely assent to the truth of his gospel, but received him into their hearts with most fervent love. “No sooner did they hear of him, than they obeyed him^b,” and accounted his service to be perfect freedom: and so unreserved was their surrender of themselves to him, that they desired “every thought,” as well as every action, “to be brought into captivity” to his will^c. In short, they “counted all things but dung for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord;” nor were their goods, their reputation, their liberty, or their life, of any value, when put in competition with his will, or when an opportunity was offered to sacrifice them to his honour^d.

Such was the reception given him wherever his name was preached: multitudes in every place “blessed themselves in him^e,” and “rejoiced in him with joy unspeakable^f.” And what a glorious mystery was this! that they should so highly honour one who had been abhorred by all his own countrymen, and executed as the vilest of malefactors! and that they should feel such love to one whom they had never seen, as to renounce for his sake all that their eyes had seen, and all that is held dear among men! This was wonderful indeed: yet, wonderful as it is, it is still daily experienced, and daily manifested, by all that believe.]

We conclude with submitting to your consideration two important QUESTIONS

1. What reception have you given to this mystery?

[Are the great subjects of Christ’s humiliation and glory disregarded by you as matters of doubtful disputation; or are they entertained with that reverence which is due to such mysterious truths? Alas! notwithstanding they are preached among

^a It seems that the different members of the text received their accomplishment in successive order of time: and if this be duly considered, the interpretation here given to the last clause will appear the most suitable of any: and it is certain that ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ may very properly be translated *he was received gloriously*. See in the Greek, Acts xx. 13, 14. Phil. iv. 19. with other passages referred to by that most instructive and judicious commentator, *Dr. Guyse*.

^b Ps. xviii. 44.

^c 2 Cor. x. 5.

^d Phil. iii. 7, 8.

^e Ps. lxxii. 17.

^f 1 Pet. i. 8.

among you, they are far from meeting with that reception they deserve. Beg then that the Holy "Spirit would take of the things that are Christ's and shew them unto you^g." And endeavour to give the Lord Jesus such a reception now, that you may be welcomed by him in the great day of his appearing.]

2. Are you experiencing the gospel to be indeed a mystery of *godliness*?

[It is to but little purpose to "call Christ Lord, if we do not the things which he says." He will "save us *from* our sins;" but never *in* them. He came to "redeem us from iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works^h." Let us not then attempt to make him "a minister of sinⁱ;" but endeavour to shew the sanctifying, as well as saving, efficacy of his gospel. Let us shew, that while "the grace of God bringeth salvation to us, it teaches us to deny all sin, and to live righteously, soberly, and *godly* in this present world^k."]]

^g John xvi. 15.

ⁱ Gal. ii. 17.

^h Tit. ii. 14.

^k Tit. ii. 11, 12.

APPENDIX.

CCCXXI. THE UNCONCERN OF MEN AMIDST GOD'S CALLS TO REPENTANCE.

Isai. xxii. 12—14. *In that day did the Lord God of hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth : and behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine : let us eat and drink ; for to-morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you, till ye die, saith the Lord God of hosts.*

TRUE religion is equally abhorrent from an atheistical contempt of God's providence, and a presumptuous reliance on it. It teaches us neither to "trust in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we^a ;" nor, on the other hand, to trust in human devices, to the neglect of him, who "worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

It was for the latter of these sins, that the Jews were reproved in the words before us. The Assyrians had invaded their country, and were coming against Jerusalem itself : and the Jews, instead of crying to God for help, contented themselves with fortifying their city ; and lived as securely as if no danger were at hand. This greatly incensed God, and caused him to denounce against them his heaviest judgments.

The words before us will lead us to consider

I. The duty to which God calls us

The terms used in the text were intended to express repentance

[The shaving of the head, and cutting of the beard, and putting on of sackcloth, were used among the Jews as indications of sorrow^b. Of themselves indeed, neither those nor any other actions, however significant, had any value before God :
they

^a Jer. vii. 4.

^b Ezek. xxvii. 30, 31.

they were even hateful to him, if used without correspondent dispositions of heart^c: but, when accompanied with inward contrition, they were pleasing and acceptable in his sight^d.]

This is the duty to which God calls us at this time

[He spake to the Jewish nation by the dispensations of his providence^e, and the voice of his prophets^f. And is he not calling us to repentance at this time, by the calamities of the nation, by the command of our rulers, and by the voice of all his faithful ministers? Yes; he says aloud, “Turn ye to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning^g.”]

But how little attention we pay to him will appear, if we consider

II. The state in which we continue

The evils of which the prophet complained, are, alas! too descriptive of our state

1. We confide in our own preparations without looking to God

[So often has God prospered our naval exertions, that we almost universally overlook his providence, and ascribe our success to our own superior skill and valour. Our hopes also of future conquests are founded wholly on our own prowess. We are active enough in making preparations; but are as unmindful of God, as if we needed not his aid, nor were at all dependent on his will. For the truth of this assertion we appeal to the public prints, and to the expressions of all with whom we converse.]

2. We still live in habits of conviviality and dissipation

[It is not intemperance and excess that is the object of the prophet's reprehension, but an unsuitable gaiety of mind, at a time when it became them to be humbling themselves in dust and ashes. And is not this the case with us amongst all ranks and orders of the community? Doubtless the pressure of the public burthens must impose restraints on many: but still the change in them is not the effect of a voluntary humiliation, but the reluctant fruit of irresistible necessity.]

3. We, in too many instances, turn the very warnings of Jehovah into contempt and ridicule

[The Jews were warned of the *near approach* of their destruction: and they, to ridicule the idea, said, “Let us eat and

^c Isai. i. 13, 14. and lxvi. 3.

^d 1 Kings xxi. 27—29.

^e Mic. vi. 9. Awful visitations were always considered in that view, Judges xx. 25, 26.

^f Joel, Isaiah, &c.

^g Joel ii. 12.

and drink, for *to-morrow* we shall die." We indeed, having no information from God respecting the issue of public affairs, cannot imitate, with respect to them, the impiety of the Jews. But, in relation to infinitely more important matters, there is as much profane scoffing amongst us, as amongst them: the declarations of God's word are set at nought; and they, who most faithfully denounce God's judgments against sin and sinners, are most universally regarded either as hypocrites or fanatics.]

Let us then, as it becomes us, proceed with all fidelity to shew

III. The evil and danger of such a state

What can be more *unsuitable to our condition*?

[What should we think of a child or servant that should manifest such a spirit under our rebukes? Does such conduct then become us towards God, when he is contending with us, and chastising us for our sins? Yea, are we not as devoid of humanity as of piety, while we feel no sympathy with the thousands of our suffering fellow-creatures? Well says the prophet on a similar occasion, "Should we *then* make mirth ⁿ?" Surely it becomes us rather to "cry and howl" for the miseries that are come upon us.]

What can be more *offensive to God*?

[The word "surely" is equivalent to an oath ⁱ: and is it a light thing which causes Jehovah to swear by his own life and immortal perfections? Is it a small matter that causes "the Lord God of hosts ^k" to shut up his tender mercies, and to swear, that the guilt of such or such an action shall "never be purged away?" Must not that be beyond measure offensive to him, that can fill his breast with such "fiery indignation?" The sins that have brought down his chastisements are doubtless great: but an obstinacy under those chastisements which are intended to reform us, is a sure forerunner of our utter excision ^l.]

What can be more *destructive in its consequences*?

[The nation cannot be delivered but by means of a national repentance: nor can any individual escape the eternal wrath of God, but by means of his own personal repentance ^m. If there be only one impenitent transgressor in the whole kingdom, "God will search him out with candles," in order to "punish him ⁿ." Even in his present dispensations God

^b Ezek. xxi. 9, 10, 12.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 13, 14.

^k This title, being thrice repeated, is very emphatical.

^l Jer. vii. 12—16. Such also is the import of that threatening, Amos iv. 12. the ground of which is *five* times repeated from ver. 6 to ¹¹ f.

^m Luke xiii. 3.

ⁿ Zeph. i. 12.

God will put a difference between those who mourn for sin, and those who are at ease in Zion^o; but much more in his decisions at the day of judgment^p. Whether therefore we consider our national or our personal danger, it becomes us instantly to put away our unbelief and impenitence, and to turn to God with the deepest contrition.]

ADDRESS

[It may be thought that the injunctions given to the Jews, had respect to *them* rather than to ourselves. Let an apostle then be heard in confirmation of the prophet; and let us depart with a determination through grace to obey his voice; “Be afflicted, and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God; and he shall lift you up^q.”]

^o Amos vi. 1, 3—7. Ezek. ix. 4, 5.

^p Isa. v. 11, 12. and

^q James iv. 9, 10.

lxv. 12—14.

CCCXXII. OUR IMPENITENCE UNDER THE DIVINE CHASTISEMENTS.

Isai. ix. 13. *The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts.*

RICH as God is in mercy to repenting sinners, he is full of indignation against the impenitent—Hence his most gracious invitations and promises are often intermixed with the most awful threatenings^a—He had just before declared his intention of sending the Messiah to his chosen people—He now threatens them with utter excision for their impenitence^b—The grounds of his displeasure are no less visible amongst ourselves than among the Jews—We are at this time suffering under his chastising hand—But few, if any, of us are suitably affected with his judgments—

The solemnity of this day leads us to enquire

I. What is the end for which God chastises us?

He does not ever afflict his people willingly and without a cause—Sin is the ground of the controversy that he has with us—It is for the removal of this that he sends afflictions

Upon

^a Matt. xi. 20, 21, 28.

^b Compare ver. 6, 7, with ver. 11—15.

Upon individuals

[His most highly favoured people are not exempt from chastisement—While they have any sin unmortified, God will not leave them altogether unpunished^c—Even the upright Job had much dross which was to be purged in the furnace of affliction^d—David also found much benefit arising from his trials^e—And acknowledged them to have been tokens of God's love and faithfulness^f—Under the New Testament dispensation God has had the same end in view—He “delivered the incestuous man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus^g”—And visited with bodily sickness many of those who had profaned the Lord's supper, in order that they might not perish with the ungodly world^h—Nor can we doubt but that *our* troubles are sent for the same benevolent purpose—Of whatever kind they be, they are intended to purge away our sin, and bring us nearer unto Godⁱ—]

Upon nations

[When a nation is altogether ripe for ruin, God executes vengeance without any view to their reformation—But till then he will continue to correct them with much long-suffering and forbearance—The ten successive plagues of Egypt were sent to overcome their obstinacy—The Israelites, both in the wilderness and in Canaan, were continually informed of the distinct offences for which their various punishments were inflicted—And even their captivity in Babylon was intended *for their good*^k—We cannot precisely say what are the peculiar enormities by which we have provoked the Majesty of heaven—But it is certain that God is visiting us for sin—The calamities we this day deplore, are tokens of his displeasure^l—Nor can we expect a removal of them, till the end, for which they are sent us, is accomplished—]

It should be the business of this day to enquire

II. What effect his chastisements have produced upon us?

The rod, which is now held over us, has a voice, if we have ears to hear it^m—It calls us to repent of all our evil ways—But what change has hitherto been produced

In the nation?

[Every reform is talked of, except a reform of our hearts and lives. What order of men amongst us has duly improved this awful crisis?—Is not dissipation as prevalent among the higher

^c Jer. xxx. 11.

^e Ps. cxix. 71.

^g 1 Cor. v. 5.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 10.

Isai. xlii. 24, 25.

^d Job xxiii. 10.

^f Ps. cxix. 72.

^h 1 Cor. xi. 30, 32.

^k Jer. xxiv. 5.

^m Mic. vi. 9.

higher ranks as ever?—Is there a reformation begun among those who ought above all to be examples to the flockⁿ?—Are the watchmen, whose office it is to warn others, as earnest and faithful as the occasion requires^o?—Are evils of any kind put away from amongst us?—Or is there even at this hour any serious appearance of turning unto God?—Are not our very fasts a mere formal and hypocritical lip-service?—May they not even be numbered amongst our greatest sins?—Alas! what shall the end of these things be?—The generality are altogether regardless of God's displeasure—Because they do not feel in their own persons the stroke of his rod, they are indifferent about the calamities of others^p—Many, like Abaz, have even increased in their iniquities since the commencement of our present troubles^q—They have hardened their hearts and refused to receive correction, nor will they cry when God binds them^r—Nor is this peculiar to any one order of people more than another^s—Some are presumptuously boasting of our power to withstand the arm of God^t—Others, of whom better things might have been hoped, refuse to unite even in the outward services of this day—(Have these men never done any thing to increase our national guilt, that they refuse to deprecate our national judgments?—Or have they no occasion to implore mercy for themselves?)—To none was the prophet's complaint ever more applicable than to ourselves at this juncture^u—]

In individuals

[Some there are, we trust, who “weep between the porch and the altar”—Some are “grieved for the affliction of Joseph^x”—But these are few in number; nor are *they* by any means so deeply affected as they ought to be—But where shall we find any that have been humbled under the divine chastisements?—Who amongst us is truly “turning unto him that smiteth us?”—Who is “seeking the Lord of hosts?”—Who have been mourning over their sins this day in secret?—Who have put from them their idols and their abominations^y?—Who have cried for mercy as perishing sinners?—Or stood in the gap to intercede for their distressed country?—Happy they whose *personal* troubles have wrought this blessed change!—But we fear that few, if any, have so laid to heart the *public* calamities, as to have experienced from them such a salutary effect—]

We

ⁿ Those whom God particularly notices in the text, are “the ancient and honourable, and the prophet that teaches lies.”

^o Ezek. xxxiii. 6—8.

^q 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

^r Jer. v. 1, 4, 5.

^s Isai. i. 4—6.

^p Isai. lvii. 10.

^t Job xxxvi. 13.

^u Ver. 10.

^x Amos vi. 6.

^y Ezek. xx. 7.

We shall conclude our enquiries with some suitable and important

OBSERVATIONS

1. God will surely overcome at last

[He is now maintaining a controversy with us—Nor can we expect that he should lay aside his rod till it has accomplished his will—If we continue to walk contrary to him, no doubt he will continue to walk contrary to us—If the scourging us with rods will not suffice, he will scourge us with scorpions^z—He will repay us sevenfold more for our sins^a—*Four times* are we warned that his hand is stretched out still^b—Let us then cease from the unequal combat^c—And turn to him, before the measure of our iniquities be completely filled—]

2. If we turn to God with our whole hearts, he will cease from his anger

[We have most abundant evidence of this delightful truth—The repentance of Nineveh is a standing encouragement for all nations^d—Even the temporary humiliation of Ahab prevailed to defer the impending judgments^e—What then should not be effected if this whole nation turned to God in sincerity?—God would sooner send an angel to deliver us, or open a passage for us through the sea, than suffer our enemies to prevail against us^f—His promise to this effect is absolute^g—Let this consideration lead us to repentance—And let the prophet's advice to mourn, and fast, and weep, be followed without delay^h—]

3. If we return not to God, our present miseries will be only an earnest of far greater miseries in another world

[God punishes men in this world in their national capacity—But in the future world every individual shall answer for his own sins—Nor are we left to doubt what will be the doom of the impenitentⁱ—In comparison of that, temporal calamities are of no account—Oh! who can dwell with everlasting burnings^k?—Let me beseech you then by the terrors of the Lord—It would be terrible indeed to fall into the hands of man—But woe be to those who fall into the hands of the living God^l—Let the exhortation of Christ then sink deep into your hearts, “Fear not man, who can only kill the body, but God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell—I say unto you all, Fear HIM^m”—]

^z 1 Kings xii. 11.

^a Lev. xxvi. 21, 27, 28.

^b Isai. ix. 12, 17, 21, and x. 4.

^c Ezek. xxii. 14. Isai. x. 3.

^d Jonah iii. 10.

^e 1 Kings xxi. 29.

^f Exod. xiv. 22. with Isai. li. 10. and 2 Kings xix. 35. with Ps. xxxiv. 7

^g Jer. xviii. 8.

^h Joel ii. 12, 13.

ⁱ Luke xiii. 3.

^k Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^l Heb. x. 31.

^m Luke xii. 5.

CCCXXIII. THE EVIL AND DANGER OF INGRATITUDE.

Ps. cvi. 21—23. *They forgot God their Saviour, who had done great things in Egypt; wondrous works in the land of Ham, and terrible things by the Red Sea. Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, lest he should destroy them.*

THERE is scarcely any sin more strongly reprobated in the scripture than ingratitude—In the catalogue which the apostle gives us of crimes committed by the Heathen world, unthankfulness to God is particularly specified as one of the most heinous and inexcusable^a—And the judgments denounced against one of the most eminent saints for a single instance of it, indisputably prove, how hateful it must be in the sight of God^b—In improving the instance recorded in the text, we shall

I. Consider the history referred to

[This history, to which the text alludes, is so well known, as not to need many words either to record or explain it—There were mercies vouchsafed to the Israelites in Egypt, such as never had been experienced before from the foundation of the world— — — But they presently forgot their almighty Deliverer, and worshipped a golden calf in his stead—This justly excited the indignation of God, and determined him to destroy them—But Moses, having already fasted forty days and nights, fell down before God, and during forty more days and nights neither ate nor drank, but interceded on behalf of this rebellious people—God in answer to his intercession averted the stroke, and forbore to punish them according to their deserts^c—]

II. Apply it to existing circumstances

[We need not recal to your minds what great things God has lately done for us also in Egypt^d—Except in the history of the Jewish nation, there is scarcely any victory recorded in the annals of the world that was more glorious or complete than that vouchsafed to us—Yet how have we requited the Lord? At first, like the Jews, we were willing to give God the glory, and to sing his praise: but has not the impression worn off? and have we not shamefully “forgotten our benefactor?”

^a Rom. i. 21.

^b 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

^c Exod. xxxii. 8—14.

^d This was the first fast-day after Lord Nelson's victory near the Nile.

factor?" — — — Well might God's anger wax hot against us to consume us for such ingratitude — — — Nor can we ascribe it to any thing but the intercessions of God's people, that his wrath has not burst forth against us, as against Korah and his company, to destroy us utterly —]

III. Deduce from it some suitable observations — Observe

1. The duty of secret intercession

[We are commanded to pray for all men, and especially for kings and all that are in authority — — — Yea, even in Babylon, were the Jews taught to pray for the peace and prosperity of their very oppressors: how much more then should we intercede for our native country, where we enjoy every liberty that we can desire! — Let it not be said, that our governors do not deserve our prayers; for the injunction to pray for kings was delivered in the reign of Nero, than whom a more wicked prince could not exist — Let us then make a conscience of this duty; for if we know not to intercede for others, we have no reason to think that we have ever yet seen aright the value of our own souls —]

2. The benefit of public fasts

[The honour God has put upon public fasts is well known to all; and his answers to united supplications have been as signal as the hand of God could make them — 'The victory given to Jehosaphat^e, the respite to Nineveh^f, and the deliverance to Peter the very day before his intended destruction^g, sufficiently evince, that God will hear the united prayers of his people — Indeed, if one man, Moses, so prevailed for the saving of an whole nation, what deliverance should not nations receive, if they would all unite in prayer? — If a few individuals alone mourn for the land, they shall have at least some tokens of peculiar favour to themselves, though they should not succeed in averting God's anger from the nation at large^h — But if there be not some to stand in the breach, it cannot fail but that we must be overwhelmedⁱ —]

3. The guilt and danger of neglecting Christ

[Great as were the mercies vouchsafed to the Jews in Egypt, they are not to be compared with the redemption which we have experienced through Christ: as our bondage was infinitely more grievous, so the means used to effect our deliverance, infinitely enhance the value of the deliverance itself: we are bought with blood, and that blood was the blood of our incarnate God — — — What destruction then must not we

^e 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15.

^f Jonah iii. 10.

^g Acts xii. 5—8.

^h Ezek. ix. 4, 6. Zeph. iii. 18.

ⁱ Ezek. xxii. 31, 32. Amos vi. 1, 6.

we expect if we should forget “ God our Saviour^k ? ” — — — Nor is it the intercession of others that shall ever prevail to avert it from us ; we must pray, every one of us for himself— Not but that mutual intercession may in this respect be productive of great benefits—Let us then “ bear his great goodness in remembrance,” and let it be our song in time, as it shall be through all eternity—]

^k Heb. ii. 3.

CCCXXIV. THE CHARACTERISTIC MARKS OF TRUE PENITENCE.

Hos. vi. 1. *Come, and let us return unto the Lord : for he hath torn, and he will heal us ; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*

THE spiritual dereliction which the people of God have at times experienced, has ever been considered as the most afflictive of all chastisements : but it has also been the most salutary, and most effectual. The benefits arising from it were strongly exemplified in the Israelites, who after having long withstood the united efforts of all the prophets, were on a sudden constrained by it to turn to God with unfeigned contrition.

The words before us are the expressions of that repentance which was excited in the Israelites by God's departure from them, and by his grace that accompanied the affliction^a : and they suggest to us a proper occasion to consider

I. The characteristic marks of true penitence

It will always be attended with

1. A sense of our departure from God

[Unregenerate men live “ without God in the world ; ” and yet the thought of their being at a distance from God never enters into their minds. But as soon as the grace of repentance is given to them, they see that they “ have been like sheep going astray, every one to his own way,” and that they can never find happiness but in “ returning to the shepherd and bishop of their souls.”]

2. An

^a Hos. v. ult.

2. An acknowledgment of affliction as a just chastisement for sin

[The impenitent heart murmurs and rebels under the divine chastisements: the penitent "hears the rod and him that appointed it." He blesses God for the troubles that have brought him to reflection^b; and while he smarts under the wounds that have been inflicted on him, he regards them as the merciful tokens of parental love^c.]

3. A determination to return to God

[When a man is once thoroughly awakened to a sense of his lost condition, he can no longer be contented with a formal round of duties. He reads, hears, prays in a very different way from that in which he was wont to do. "What shall I do to be saved?" is the one thought that occupies his mind; and he is resolved through grace to sacrifice every thing that would obstruct the salvation of his soul. To hear of Christ, to seek him, to believe on him, and to receive out of his fulness, these are from henceforth his chief desire, his supreme delight^d.]

4. A desire that others should return to him also

[As all the other marks, so this especially was manifested by the repenting Israelites. This is peculiarly insisted on as characteristic of the great work that shall be accomplished in the latter day^e. This has distinguished the church of God in all ages! The penitent knows how awful the state of all around him is, and how much he has contributed by his influence and example to destroy them; and therefore, though he expects nothing but "hatred for his good-will," he feels it incumbent on him to labour for their salvation: and, if it were possible, he would instruct, convert, and save the whole world.]

To promote an increase of such repentance amongst us, we shall proceed to state

II. The grounds on which a penitent may take encouragement to return to God

Whatever grounds of despondency we may feel within ourselves, we may take encouragement

1. From a general view of God's readiness to heal us

[God has not left himself without witness even among the heathen world; but has shewn, by his goodness to the evil and unthankful, that he is ever ready to exercise mercy. But to us who have his revealed will, he has left no possibility of doubt: for "if he spared not his own Son, but delivered
him

^b Ps. xvi. 7. and cxix. 67.

^d Song v. 6. 8.

^c Ps. cxix. 75.

^e Isai. ii. 3.

him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The invitations and promises with which his word is filled, are a further evidence to us, that he is willing to receive every returning prodigal, and that he will in no wise cast out any who come unto him. On this ground the whole world may adopt the words of the text, and say, "Come, let us return unto the Lord."]

2. From that particular discovery of it which we have in the wounds he has inflicted on us

[The Israelites seemed to lay a peculiar stress on this, and to infer, from the very strokes of his rod, his willingness to "heal and bind them up." They even felt an assurance that his return to them would be both speedy and effectual^f. Thus as soon as any person is brought to acknowledge the hand of God in his afflictions, he will improve them in this very way. Whether his troubles be of a temporal or spiritual nature, he will adore God for not leaving him in a secure and thoughtless state, and for awakening him by any means to a sense of his guilt and danger. He will begin immediately to argue as Manoah's wife; "Would the Lord have shewn me this mercy, if he had intended to destroy me?" Does a father correct his child because he has *no* love to him? Are not the very expressions of his anger to be viewed as tokens of his love^h, and as *an earnest* of his returning favour as soon as the child shall have implored forgiveness?

Let those then who feel the burthen of their sins, remember, that it is God who has given them to see their iniquities; and that, the heavier their burthen is, the more abundant encouragement they have to cast it on the Lordⁱ.]

APPLICATION

1. To those who have deserted God

[Let us only reflect on the months and years that we have past without any affectionate remembrance of God, or any earnest application to Christ as our Mediator and Advocate; and we shall not need many words to convince us, that we are included in this number. But let us consider whom "we have forsaken; even God, the fountain of living waters;" and, with all our labour in pursuit of happiness, we have only "hewed out for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water^k." Let our past experience suffice to shew us the vanity and folly of our ways: and let us "return unto him from whom we have deeply revolted." But let us beware lest we "heal our wounds slightly." Christ is the brazen Serpent

^f Ver. 2. Song i. 4. Zech. viii. 21. John i. 41, 45.

^g Judg. xiii. 23.

^h Heb. xii. 6.

ⁱ Matt. xi. 28.

^k Jer. ii. 13.

pent to which all must look: He is the good Samaritan who alone can help us, and who has submitted to be himself "wounded for our transgressions," that he might "heal us by his stripes."]

2. To those who are deserted by God

[God does find it necessary sometimes to withdraw the light of his countenance from his people. But, whatever he may have done on some particular occasions, we are sure that in general he does not forsake us till after we have forsaken him. Hence, when the Israelites were deserted by him, they did not say, let us pray that he will return to us; but, let us return unto him: for they were well assured that, as the alienation had begun on their part, so it would be terminated as soon as ever they should humble themselves in a becoming manner. Let those then who are under the hidings of God's face, enquire, what has occasioned his departure from them: and let them put away "the accursed thing," and turn to him with their whole hearts. Let them rest assured, that "there is balm in Gilead;" and that, if they come to him in the name of Christ, their "backslidings shall be healed," and "their happiness restored¹." *]

¹ Hos. xiv. 4. Lam. iii. 31, 32. Ps. xcvii. 11. and cxlvii. 3.

* If this were the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the APPLICATION might be comprised in the following observations. 1. The calamities of the nation are manifest tokens of God's displeasure, and calls to repentance—2. All the efforts of our rulers to heal our wounds will be in vain, if we do not repent—3. A general turning unto God would bring us speedy and effectual relief.—

CCCXXV. A CALL TO REPENTANCE.

Jer. xiii. 15—17. *Hear ye, and give ear, be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive.*

REPENTANCE is at all times a proper subject to be enforced; but more especially on a day professedly set apart for national humiliation. The words before us were addressed to the Jews when God was about to send them

them into captivity in Babylon: and they may well be considered as addressed to us, now that his hand is lifted up for the punishment, and, for aught we know, for the destruction, of our land.

They manifestly contain the Prophet's exhortation—his arguments to enforce it—and his determination in case he should not be able to prevail on the people to repent.

But the occasion, and the text itself, call rather for exhortation than discussion. We shall therefore, though not without a due attention to the order of the words, proceed to urge upon you the great, the seasonable, the indispensable duty of repentance.

[Know then, that it is "*God who speaketh.*" The words delivered to you in his name, as far as they accord with his mind and will, are *his* words, and are to be received as though you heard them uttered by a voice from heaven^a.

"*Hear ye, and give ear,*" and let not the pride of your hearts obstruct your attention. Often has God spoken to you by the dispensations of his providence, and the declarations of his grace; yea, moreover, by the still small voice of conscience: but ye, the generality of you at least, have turned a deaf ear, and refused to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely^b. But "*be not proud.*" Ye must hear at last, whether ye will or not. Let then your stout hearts be humbled; and receive with meekness the engrafted word^c.

In the name of God we say to you, REPENT. "*Give glory to the Lord your God.*" It is by repentance only that you can do this^d. Repentance glorifies all his perfections; his omniscience that sees your transgressions, his justice that punishes them, his mercy that pardons them, and his wisdom and goodness that have provided such a marvellous salvation for ruined man.

O glorify his omniscience: say, Lord, thou art privy to all the secrets of my heart; thou knowest that I am inexpressibly vile^e.

Glorify his justice; and acknowledge, that if he cut you off, and consign you to the lowest hell, you have no more than your just desert^f.

Glorify his mercy; and plead it with him as the only, the all-sufficient ground of your hope and confidence^g.

Glorify

^a 2 Cor. v. 20. 1 Thess. ii. 13.

^c Jam. i. 21.

^e Jer. xvii. 9. Job. xl. 4. and xlii. 2. 6.

^f Matt. xxii. 12, 13. Rom. iii. 4.

^b Job xxxiii. 14.

^d Josh. vii. 19. Rev. xvi. 9.

^g Ps. li. i.

Glorify his wisdom and goodness, that have opened a way for your return to him through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son. Declare, that you have no trust whatever but in the blood and righteousness of that almighty Saviour ^h.

To persist in impenitence is the certain way to bring down the heaviest judgments upon your souls. The darkness that hangs over the nation ⁱ, cannot be dispelled in any other way; much less can that with which God menaces your souls. O consider “*the darkness, the gross darkness,*” in which they are involved, who are shut up under judicial blindness and final obduracy ^k; or who, under the terrors of a guilty conscience, “*stumble on the dark mountains*” of unbelief, and, like the Jews (who thought they had clean escaped from their pursuers) are overtaken by the sword of vengeance ^l, so that “*while they look for light, it is turned into the shadow of death,*” and they are plunged into “*the blackness of darkness for evermore* ^m.”

But repentance may yet avert the storm, both from the nation, and from our own souls. Numberless are the declarations of God to this effect ⁿ; and numberless the instances wherein it has been verified ^o. But let us remember what kind of repentance it is which will thus prevail: it is not a mere formal confession of sin with a partial reformation of the life, but such a repentance as glorifies all the perfections of the Deity; such a repentance as has an especial respect to Christ, who alone can procure our pardon, and in whom alone we can ever find acceptance with God.

Would to God that we might prevail with you, and that you were all, in good earnest, turning unto God! Could we once behold this, O how should we rejoice; and how would “*the very angels in heaven rejoice*” on your account! But, “*if ye will not repent*” (as it is to be feared too many of you will not) “*my soul,*” and the souls of all who are aware of your condition, “*shall weep in secret places for your pride; yea, our eyes shall weep sore and run down with tears,*” on account of your present and approaching bondage. The godly in all ages have wept over those who felt no concern for their own souls ^p: and we trust that there are many, who will lay to heart the evils which ye are too proud to acknowledge, too obdurate to deplore. But we intreat you to consider, Is there one amongst us all, that is not a sinner before God ^q? and does not

^h Phil. iii. 8, 9.

^k Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^l This is the *literal* meaning of the text.

^m 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12. Jude 13.

ⁿ To nations, 2 Chron. vii. 14; and to individuals, Isai. lv. 7.

^o Nineveh, the dying thief, &c.

^p Ps. cxix. 136. Ezra ix. 3. and x. 6. 2 Pet. ii. 8. Rom. ix. 1, 2; above all, Luke xix. 41.

^q Joel ii. 2, 3. perhaps a true picture of our present state.

^r 1 Kings viii. 46. Jam. iii. 2.

not the broken law denounce a curse against us^r? and if God be true, will not that curse be inflicted on the impenitent? Why then will ye not humble yourselves before an offended God, a merciful Redeemer? Alas! for *your* “*pride,*” and stoutness of heart! How lamentable is it, that you, who have been baptized into the name of Christ, and are therefore properly “the Lord’s flock,” should be so “carried captive” by your lusts, and by your great adversary, the Devil^s! O think, it is but a little time, and your captivity will be complete; and, lost beyond a possibility of redemption, you will be bound in chains of everlasting darkness^t. And is not here a cause for sorrow on your account? “Oh that mine head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night” for your unhappy state!^u

We will not, however, conclude, without once more intreating you to “give glory to the Lord your God;” that so “your light may rise in obscurity, and your darkness may be as the noon-day^x.”]

^r Gal. iii. 10.^s 2 Tim. ii. 26.^t Jude 6.^u Jer. ix. 1.^x Isai. lxxviii. 8, 10.

CCCXXVI. THE ONLY REFUGE OF SINNERS.

Isai. xxvi. 20, 21. *Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.*

GOD has been pleased to manifest at all times such a tender concern for the welfare of his people, that he has scarcely ever done any thing of importance, which he has not revealed to them beforehand by his servants the prophets^a. Did he determine to destroy the earth with a flood? he instructed Noah first to build an ark for the preservation of himself and his family^b. Was he about to rain fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah? he could not execute his vengeance till righteous Lot had retired to a place of safety^c. Had he decreed to bring on Jerusalem such judgments as the world had never before seen? he warns his people to escape from it, and provides

^a Amos iii. 7.^b Gen. vi. 13, 14.^c Gen. xix. 22.

provides them a retreat in the neighbouring mountains^d. Thus he had decreed the destruction of Babylon; and the preceding part of the chapter contains a hymn of triumph, which should be sung by his people on that occasion. But, as there would be great danger of their being involved in the common calamity, he apprizes them of his intention, and exhorts them to hide themselves, till the danger should be overpast. It is not, however, necessary to confine the words to this sense; because there are many other occasions on which God comes forth to punish mankind; and because the advice given, is suitable to all such occasions.

In discoursing on this passage, we shall call your attention to

I. The warning here given

Heaven is the habitation of God's holiness and glory^e. And from thence he is said to "come forth," when he manifests himself in any signal manner upon earth^f. And, alas! how often do the iniquities of men necessitate him to come down and visit them with his sore judgments^g! But there is one period in particular, when God shall come, not to punish one particular nation only, but all who shall have lived and died in sin, from the foundation of the world

[The day of judgment is called "the day of wrath," "the day of vengeance," "the day of the revelation of God's righteous judgments," "the day of the perdition of ungodly men^h." In that day the Lord Jesus Christ, "whom the heavens have received till the time of the restitution of all thingsⁱ," "shall come in power and great glory:" and the express end of his coming will be "to reveal his wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men^k."

Now he winks, as it were, at men's iniquities^l; and endures with much patience and longsuffering the vessels of wrath that are fitting themselves for destruction^m: yea, to such a degree does he exercise forbearance towards them, that scoffers are ready to say, Where is the promise of his comingⁿ? But soon the time fixed for the exercise of his grace, shall come to an

^d Luke xxi. 21, 22. ^e Isai. lvii. 15. and lxiii. 15. ^f Mic. i. 3.

^g If this were the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the particular judgments that are deprecated, should be specified here as the tokens of God's displeasure; and should be dwelt upon at some length.

^h Rom. ii. 5. ⁱ 2 Pet. iii. 7. ^j Acts iii. 21. ^k Rom. i. 18.

^l Acts xvii. 30. ^m Rom. ix. 22. ⁿ 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

an end, and all the dead shall be summoned to his tribunal, to receive at his hands according to their works^o.

Nor let any one think that gross iniquities only shall be noticed in that day; for God will “manifest even the counsels of men’s hearts,” and “bring every secret thing into judgment^p :” then a forgetfulness of God, or a rejection of his gospel, shall as surely be punished with everlasting destruction, as any of those sins which are more reprobated and condemned by the world^q.]

The warning being of such universal and infinite importance, let us consider

II. The advice accompanying it

[The exhortation in the text may simply import, that we should retire to our chambers to commune with our own hearts, and with our God^r. In this view it recommends the duty, the indispensably necessary duty, of secret prayer.

But by “chambers” we may understand God himself, who is often spoken of in this light^s, and who is the sure refuge of all that flee unto him. Every perfection of his forms, as it were, an hiding-place whereto we may run for safety. His wisdom would be our guide, his power our defence, “his faithfulness and truth our shield and buckler.”

To us, who are taught to view God in the person of Christ, the word “chambers” may convey a more immediate intimation respecting Christ himself, who is our refuge^t, and whom this very prophet describes as “an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the storm^u.” His person, work, and offices are a security to his people, that “they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life.”

To him therefore we should flee by faith, and hide ourselves from the impending judgments. As Noah entered into the ark^x, which was the appointed mean of delivering him from the deluge, and as the Israelites shut themselves up in their houses to escape the sword of the destroying angel^y, so are we to take refuge, as it were, in Christ, that the sword of divine justice may not slay, or the deluge of God’s wrath overwhelm us.]

While we listen to the voice of God, we must not overlook

III. The particular manner in which the advice is given

[Almost every word of this exhortation contains an argument for our compliance with it.

If

^o Rev. xx. 12, 13.

^q Ps. ix. 17. 2 Thess. i. 7, 8.

^r Ps. xc. 1. & lvii. 1.

^s Isai. xxxii. 2.

^x Gen. vii. 7.

^p 1 Cor. iv. 5.

^r Ps. iv. 4. Matt. vi. 6.

^t Heb. vi. 18.

^y Exod. xii. 22, 28.

If we were bidden to hide ourselves in a pit or a dungeon, methinks, any place should be a welcome hiding-place from the wrath of God. But it is to our own "chamber," where every thing is provided for our rest and comfort; yea, it is a pavilion^z surrounded by guards, and furnished with royal dainties; it is even to the tabernacle^a wherein God himself dwells, and where we shall have most intimate communion with him, that we are told to flee: shall we need any inducement to yield to such advice?

If we cannot endure confinement (though surely we can have no reason to complain of that in such a retreat) we are told it is to be only for "a moment," yea, lest that should appear too long, it is said to be only for "a little moment." Did the Israelites think a single night too long, when they were to be screened from the destroying angel? and shall we think a moment, a little moment (for such in truth is the present life) too long to abide in Christ, that we may escape the wrath of an incensed God?

The certainty of success is another argument which may well induce us to follow this advice. Were there only a distant probability of obtaining deliverance from such unspeakable miseries, it were a very sufficient reason for our trying the experiment: but when success, as the text intimates, is certain to attend our efforts, shall we need any persuasion to exert ourselves?

On the other hand, the certainty that God's indignation must fall upon us, if we be not found in Christ, ought to operate powerfully on our hearts: for "who can stand before his indignation? who can abide the fierceness of his anger^b?" The fate of those who despised the warnings of Moses, and sought not shelter from the storms of hail, shews us what we must expect, if we seek not refuge in Christ Jesus^c.

Above all, the earnestness of the exhortation should overcome the reluctance of our hearts. To enter fully into its spirit, we should conceive a parent, seeing a savage beast running towards his heedless and unprotected child in order to destroy him. The affrighted father calls to him in the agony of his mind; "Come, my son, run into the house, shut the door, hide yourself till the danger be overpast." Thus, precisely thus, does God himself cry to each of us. He knows our danger; he sees our inadvertence; and, with all the anxiety of a parent, he calls to us. Must we not be more deaf than adders, more obdurate than rocks, if we will not obey his voice?

But there is one thing yet, which must on no account be overlooked. The language is intentionally changed from the plural

^z Ps. xxvii. 5.

^b Nah. i. 6.

^a Ib.

^c Exod. ix, 19, 25.

plural to the singular; "Come, my people, enter *thou*," &c. *One* is ready to think, that he has no need to fear the indignation of God: *another* thinks he is too unworthy to be admitted into the chamber to which others have fled. But God addresses both the one and the other of them; "Enter *thou*;" for, however secure thou mayest think thyself, there is no security but in Christ; and "*thou*;" for unworthy as thou art, it is "*thy*" chamber; it was erected for such as thee; and the more unworthy thou art in thy own estimation, the more ready admittance shalt thou find there; the more certainly also shalt thou enjoy in it everlasting security*.

Thus whether we consider the chamber to which we are to flee, the time we are to abide in it, the certainty of success, the danger of delay, or the earnest manner in which God addresses every one of us in particular, we should without hesitation follow the advice, and seek deliverance in Christ our Lord. None of us should indulge security; none of us should give way to desponding fears. But, rejoicing that the chamber is not yet barred against us, we should all hide ourselves in it; nor venture out of it one single moment, till the danger be for ever past.]

* This section might not improperly form the basis of a particular *application* to the self-righteous Pharisee, and the self-condemning penitent.

CCCXXVII. GOD THE ONLY PROPER OBJECT OF FEAR.

Isai. viii. 12—14. *Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be for a sanctuary.*

RELIGION, though conducive to our happiness at all times, is more especially so in seasons of adversity. It points out to us a source of strength and consolation, while they who are strangers to its influence, are left to struggle without effect, or to faint in despair. In this view it appears in the words before us, in which the prophet is instructed how to act in the most arduous circumstances, and how to relieve the minds of those who were bowed down with terror on account of the confederate armies of Syria and Israel^a.

The

^a Chap. vii. 2.

The direction given him by God may be considered

I. In reference to our souls

We are apt to entertain desponding thoughts with respect to our salvation

[Scarcely does the desire of salvation arise in the breast, before it meets with many discouraging reflections, "How can I give up the world? how can I overcome my lusts? how can I ever comply with the requisitions of the gospel?" In a more advanced state, the allurements of sense, the temptations of Satan, the opposition of friends, and the menaces of enemies, often appear to place insurmountable obstacles in our way. And Christians too frequently *dishearten one another* by the mutual relation of their doubts and difficulties.]

But we ought to have our eyes continually fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ

[Christ is the Lord of hosts, of whom the text speaks ^b: and St. Peter, having these very difficulties, together with the text also, in his view, exhorts us to sanctify HIM in our hearts ^c. HE has all things in heaven and earth under his control ^d. All our enemies, whether men, or devils, or our own lusts, are as nothing in his hands. Him therefore we should fear, as alone able to do us any real injury; and him we should "sanctify," trusting in his wisdom, power, and faithfulness, to defeat our adversaries, and to make us more than conquerors over all.]

In him we should find a sure protection from every evil

[Christ is like the cities of refuge, which preserved the manslayer from the vindictive sword of the pursuer of blood. If once we obtain an interest in him, the wrath of God can never come upon us; nor can either men or devils destroy our souls ^e. Only let us fear him, and confide in him; and we may be as sure of victory as if all our enemies were already bruised under our feet. In the midst of troubles, of whatever kind they be, we may be peaceful ^f, confident ^g, triumphant ^h.]

But the present occasion requires us to consider the text

II. In reference to our national concerns

In seasons of difficulty and danger we are but too ready to faint

[There is, it must be confessed, abundant reason at this time,

^b Compare the words following the text with Rom. ix. 33.

^c 1 Pet. iii. 14, 15.

^d Matt. xxviii. 18.

^e Rom. viii. 1.

^f Ps. xlvi. 1, 2.

^g Ps. xxvii. 3, 5.

^h Rom. viii. 35—39.

time, according to human appearances, to cry out, A confederacy, a confederacy^l. But still we should not yield to dejection and despondency, since, however proudly our enemies may vaunt themselves, there is one infinitely above them^k.]

But God is the only proper object of our fear

[Men are but as “the staff in the hands of God;” which cannot hurt any, except those whom *he* is pleased to strike. Their hosts may be numerous; but he is the LORD of hosts, at whose will they draw the sword; and at whose command they must restore it to its scabbard. Now, if we do not tremble at the sight of a weapon, but only at the wrath of him who uses it, let us regard nothing but the displeasure of our incensed God. Let us “fear *him*,” and “sanctify *him* in our hearts.” Let us humble ourselves before him, and rely on his gracious providence. However strong we may suppose our fleets and armies to be, let us trust, not in them, but in the living God, who can either destroy them in an instant, or crown them with victory, as seemeth good to him.]

If we trust in him he will interpose for our deliverance

[Numberless are the instances wherein he has shewn mercy to penitent nations. And if at this time we kept such a fast as we ought, and really turned from our iniquities, he would appear for us. This he has promised^l: nor need we doubt but that he is both able and willing to perform it. At all events, if the measure of our national iniquities be full, so that God will no more be intreated for it, yet shall *we* be screened from the evils that shall come upon it, or have such consolation under them, as shall evince his truth and faithfulness^m.]

APPLICATION

[Let us this day apply our minds to the consideration of our personal and national sins, and turn with unfeigned penitence unto God. Let us tremble on account of the temporal judgments which he has inflicted, and the eternal judgments which he has threatened. But let us not affix limits to his power and grace. Let us rather enlarge our conceptions of his goodness, in proportion as our need of his mercy may seem to have increased. Then will he interpose both for our national relief, and for our personal prosperity. He will make it to appear, that “he is a buckler to them that trust in him;” and that, “if he be for us, none can successfully be against us.”]

^l When we had to contend with almost the whole of Europe, and were afflicted with an unprecedented scarcity besides.

^k Exod. xviii. 11.

^l Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

^m Ezek. xi. 16.

CCCXXVIII. THE USE OF COVENANTING WITH GOD.

2 Chron. xxix. 10, 11. *Now it is in mine heart to make a covenant with the Lord God of Israel, that his fierce wrath may turn away from us. My sons, be not now negligent.*

A TRULY pious man will not be satisfied with serving God in his closet—

He will exert his influence to bring others also to a sense of their duty—

The public exercise of the ministry indeed belongs to those only who are duly called to it^a—

But all who are possessed of authority (parents, masters, magistrates, and kings) should use it for the promoting of virtue and religion—

Christians of every rank and description should exhort one another^b—

We have a noble example set before us in the conduct of Hezekiah—

As soon as he came to the throne, he set himself to restore the service of the temple—

And called upon all, both ministers and people, to make a solemn covenant with their God—

The royal proclamation for the observance of this day speaks, in effect, the language of the text

I. Shew when we have reason to apprehend that God's anger is waxed hot against us

We cannot in all cases determine how far a dispensation may be sent in anger or in love—

But in general we may say, that God is greatly incensed against us

1. When our sins are multiplied against him

[Sin is invariably the object of God's abhorrence^c—

This truth is so evident that it needs not any confirmation—

It needs only to be applied with power to our hearts and consciences—

What lamentable depravity pervades every part of the nation!—

There is no iniquity, however heinous, which is not practised without remorse—

If we look into our own bosoms, what reason for humiliation may we find!—

What

^a Heb. v. 4.

^b Heb. iii. 13.

^c Hab. i. 13. Ps. v. 5.

What ingratitude for mercies received, and impenitence for sins committed!—

What rebellion against God, what contempt of his Son, what resistance of his Spirit, have we not occasion to deplore!—

And shall not God be avenged of such a nation as this?—

Yea, have not *we* reason to fear that *we* shall be monuments of his wrath?]

2. When his judgments are multiplied upon us

[God often sends *temporal* afflictions to his people in love^d—

But *spiritual* judgments are a certain token of his wrath—

Blindness of mind, obduracy of heart, and obstinacy in sin, are among his heaviest judgments^e—

And have none of us reason to fear that these are now inflicted on us?—

But it is by temporal judgments chiefly that he punishes nations—

It was from these that Hezekiah judged of God's anger against the Jews^f—

And are not these multiplied upon our land at this time?—

Surely the displeasure of God can scarcely ever be more strongly displayed, than it is in the calamities under which we now groan—]

But that none may yield to desponding fears we shall

II. Point out the best means of averting his wrath

Repentance towards God and faith in Christ are the means prescribed by God—

But it is not a slight and superficial use of these means that will suffice—

We should solemnly devote ourselves to God in a perpetual covenant

[Not that we should attempt to renew the covenant of works—

That would make void the gospel, and seal our eternal condemnation^g—

Nor should we think to add any thing to the covenant of grace—

That was once made with Christ, and is ordered in all things and sure^h—

But we should patiently and deliberately renounce all our former ways—

We should seriously give up ourselves to God as his redeemed people—

And

^d Heb. xii. 6.

^e Ver. 8, 9.

^f Isai. vi. 9, 10.

^g Gal. iii. 10.

^h Heb. viii. 6.

And intreat him to perfect us in any way which he shall see fit—]

Such covenants as these have often been made by the most eminent saints

[Under the Old Testament dispensation they were judged acceptable to God—

Omitting many other instances, we may notice the solemn covenant of Asaⁱ—

Nor was that less remarkable which was entered into by Josiah^k—

Isaiah and Jeremiah speak of the making of such covenants as characteristic of the gospel times^l—

St. Paul highly commends the conduct of the Macedonians on account of their having thus given themselves up to God^m—

And recommends a similar practice to all Christians of every age and nationⁿ—]

Nor can we doubt of their acceptableness to God

[Hezekiah manifestly supposed that God would accept him in this duty^o—

It was recommended to Ezra in circumstances where there was but little hope remaining^p—

And God himself expressly enjoined it as the means of averting his displeasure^q—

Not that we are to suppose that there is any thing meritorious in such an act—

But, it tends, of itself, to the humiliation and confirmation of our souls—

And will be both accepted and remembered by our covenant God and Father^r—]

These means being at once so scriptural and so important, we shall

III. Urge upon you the adoption of them

We admire the tender and affectionate address of Hezekiah to the priests—

And with similar concern would we now invite you to the performance of your duty—

1. There is no time for delay

[Many are “negligent” at present in expectation of a more convenient season—

But

ⁱ 2 Chron. xv. 12—15.

^l Isai. xlv. 5. Jer. l. 4, 5.

ⁿ Rom. xii. 1.

^p Ezra x. 3.

^q Jer. iv. 4.

^k 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

^m 2 Cor viii. 5.

^o *The text.*

^r Deut. xxix. 12, 13;

But who can assure himself that he shall be alive on the morrow^s—

Or that, if he be, he shall have an inclination to that from which he is now averse?—

Or that God will grant him the aids of his Spirit, which are now refused?—

The voice of God to every one is, Seek me to-day, while it is called to-day^t—

With respect to the nation, who can tell how soon the cloud that hangs over us may burst, and overwhelm us utterly?—

Let us follow the example of the repenting Ninevites^u—

If “it be in our hearts to make a covenant,” let it instantly be done^x—

And let every one, while we are yet speaking, implore help of God to do it with sincerity—]

2. If we neglect this duty, we *cannot hope* to escape the wrath of God

[Sodom was destroyed, because they laughed at God’s threatenings as idle tales—

And the strongest empires, in succession, have fallen a sacrifice to their sins—

Who then shall protect *us*, if we continue to provoke the Majesty of heaven?—

But, whatever be the fate of the nation, we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ—

And there none will be acknowledged as his people, who had not voluntarily taken him for their Lord and Saviour—

If then ye have any regard for your eternal welfare, neglect him no longer—

But, in the penitent language of the prophet, devote yourselves to his service^y.]

3. If we heartily engage in this duty, we have *nothing to fear*

[Were such a covenant general through the nation, God would soon remove his judgments—

But whatever come upon the land, God’s faithful people shall be objects of his favour—

Though they may be involved in the general calamities, they shall be comforted with the divine presence^z—

They need not therefore be agitated with fear on account of God’s displeasure in this world—

Nor have they any thing to dread in the eternal world^a—

Let us then enter into this matter with our whole hearts—

And pray day and night for grace to perform our vows—

Unfaithfulness

^s Jam. iv. 14.

^t Heb. iii. 13, 15.

^u Jonah iii. 5—9.

^x Ps. cxix. 60.

^y Isai. xxvi. 13.

^z Ps. xxxiv. 18, 19.

^a Mal. iii. 17.

Unfaithfulness to our engagements will incense God still more against us—

And provoke him to inflict yet heavier judgments upon us^b—

It were even better never to have vowed, than to vow and not pay^c—

He however, who puts it into our heart to make, can enable us to keep, our covenant^d—

Let us then engage simply in dependence on the divine strength—

But found all our hopes of acceptance on that better and unchangeable covenant, which Christ has entered into on our behalf—]

^b Jer. xxxiv. 18—20. ^c Eccl. v. 5. 2 Pet. ii. 21. ^d Jude 24.

CCCXXIX. THE REQUISITES FOR ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.

¹ Kings viii. 38, 39. *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this house: then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest.*

RELIGION is often thought to be an employment fit only for weak minds, or for those who have nothing else to engage their attention—

But it is worthy the pursuit of the wisest and greatest men—

Never did Solomon appear more glorious than when uttering these words—

At the head of all his subjects he dedicated his temple to God—

He set them a bright example of piety and devotion—

And interceded, not for them only, but for all succeeding generations

In this portion of his instructive prayer we may see

I. The requisites for acceptable prayer

An humble, upright, fervent, believing, submissive, obediential frame of mind is necessary when we approach the throne of grace—

But the most essential requisites for acceptable worship are comprised in

1. A deep

1. A deep sense of our own depravity

[The "plague of one's own heart" is, one's indwelling corruption^a—

"Every one" has some "sin that more easily besets him"—

Not that a mere acquaintance with this plague is sufficient—

We must know the depth and inveteracy of our disorder—

Our knowledge too must produce an unfeigned self-abhorrence—

And a full conviction of our utter helplessness—

Nor without this knowledge can we offer up acceptable prayer—

We cannot lament what we neither feel nor know—

Or seek for mercy, when we perceive not our need of it—

While ignorant of our depravity, we are not in a state to receive mercy—

We should not even be willing to accept of mercy on God's terms—

The very offers of salvation would rather excite our displeasure than our gratitude^b—]

2. A believing view of Christ

[The temple of Solomon was the more immediate residence of the Deity—

All were on this account directed to look towards it when they prayed—

That temple was typical of the Lord Jesus Christ^c—

In him "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"—

To him our eyes are therefore to be directed^d—

We are to offer all our petitions to him, or in his name^e—

This regard to him is necessary to the acceptance of our prayers—

It is through him alone that we gain access to the Deity^f—

We cannot approach the Father in any other way^g—

Nor

^a Some understand "plague" as expressing some loathsome disorder; and the rather because it is translated "sore" in the parallel passage 2 Chron. vi. 29. This is the true sense of it when it relates to the body; but *here* the heart is represented as the seat of this disorder, and therefore it must be understood of sin. This is confirmed by what is said in the text, of God's knowing the heart.

^b A man, not sensible that he had subjected himself to capital punishment by breaking the laws of his country, would reject with indignation an offer of deliverance from an ignominious death: but a self-condemned criminal on the eve of his execution would receive such an offer gladly.

^c See John ii. 19, 21, and compare Exod. xxiii. 21, with the expression "My name shall be there," 1 Kings viii. 29.

^d Isai. xlv. 22.

^e John xiv. 13, 14.

^f Eph. ii. 18.

^g John xiv. 6.

Nor is there any other channel whereby the divine blessings can flow down to us ^h—

On these accounts we must “stretch out our hands towards” HIM—

We must view HIM as our only source of spiritual blessings—]

They who truly seek after God will soon experience

II. The efficacy of prayer when attended with those requisites

Carnal, cold, or unbelieving petitions, will receive no answer ⁱ—

But humble and believing prayer will obtain the richest blessings

1. National

[The passage before us relates to the whole Jewish nation—

It supposes them to have incurred the heavy displeasure of God—

And teaches them how they are to avert his wrath—

Nor did God leave them in suspense about the issue of such humiliation—

He declared in a vision to Solomon that his petitions were accepted ^k—

The Jewish history affords many striking instances of deliverance vouchsafed to a repenting people ^l—

Nor can we doubt but that the same means would still be crowned with the like success ^m—]

2. Personal

He who “knows our heart” will grant all that we can desire ⁿ—

Forgiveness of sin

[Who more infamous and abandoned than that woman ^o?—

Yet she, in humility and faith, applied to Jesus ^p—

And received an assurance that her iniquities were forgiven ^q—]

Peace

^h John i. 16.

ⁱ Jam. iv. 3. Matt. xv. 8, 9. Jam. i. 6, 7.

^k 2 Chron. vii. 12—14.

^l Jehosaphat praying according to the direction in the text, 2 Chron. xx. 5—13. expressly reminded God of his promise, ver. 9. And the success of his prayer far exceeded all reasonable expectation; see ver. 22—25.

^m If this were a *Last Sermon*, it would be proper to enlarge a little on this idea in reference to the peculiar state of the nation at the time.

ⁿ 1 John v. 14, 15.

^o Luke vii. 37, 39.

^p Luke vii. 38.

^q Ib. 47, 48, 50.

Peace of conscience

[How troubled, almost to distraction, were the murderers of our Lord ^r!—

But, according to Peter's direction, they looked to Jesus ^s—

And were immediately filled with "peace and joy in believing ^t"—]

* Deliverance from temporal troubles

[We cannot conceive greater temporal affliction than that endured by Jonah ^u—

Yet, when to appearance irrecoverably lost, he prayed in this manner ^x—

And experienced a most unparalleled deliverance ^y—]

* Victory over our spiritual enemies

[With what vehemence did Satan assault the apostle Paul ^z!—

The afflicted saint cried with earnestness to the Lord Jesus ^a—

His troubles were immediately turned into triumphant exultations ^b—]

Renewal after the divine image

[Nothing on earth does a believer desire so much as this—

Yet this shall be attained in the same way—

An humble and believing view of Christ shall effect it ^c—]

* A peaceful death

[Stephen died by the hands of cruel and bloodthirsty enemies ^d—

But he offered an humble and believing prayer to Christ ^e—

And his death was to him as a serene and peaceful sleep ^f—]

A glorious immortality

[He who died *justly* by the hands of the public executioner must have merited in an high degree the wrath of God ^g—

Nevertheless in his last hour he directed his eyes to Christ ^h—

And that very day was he admitted with Christ to Paradise ⁱ—]

APPLICATION

[Let none despair on account of the greatness of their sins—

Or of the judgments of God which are already inflicted on them—

God

^r Acts ii. 37.

^s Ib. 38.

^t Ib. 46.

^u Acts vii. 54.

^x Ib. 59.

^y Ib. 60.

^z 2 Cor. xii. 7.

^a Ib. 8.

^b Ib. 9.

^c Ib. iii. 18.

^d Luke xxxiii. 41.

^e Ib. 42.

^f Ib. 43.

God will suffer none to “ seek his face in vain ”—

Let every one then bewail “ the plague of his own heart ”—

And offer up believing prayers “ towards God’s holy oracle ”— †]

† This will suffice for two Sermons, the first head being the subject of one, and the second head of the other. If it form the ground of one Sermon only, those particulars which are marked with an asterisk * under the second head may be omitted.

CCCXXX. GOD WILL BE FOUND OF SINCERE
WORSHIPPERS.

Jer. xxix. 11—13. *I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*

THE calamities which God inflicts upon mankind in this world are intended to bring them to repentance: and though he often removes his rod in anger, when he sees that it produces not the desired effect, yet he often continues to punish till he sees that the heart is humbled for its iniquity—Thus he dealt with the Jews whom he sent captive to Babylon—They at first despised his chastening, and promised themselves a speedy return to their native land: but he declared that their captivity should be protracted to the end of seventy years; and that, at the expiration of that time, when they should have learned to acknowledge him, he would again appear for them, and bring them back in answer to their fervent petitions—His declaration respecting this suggests to us two important observations

I. God’s purposes of love and peace shall all in due time be accomplished

God has “ thoughts of peace ” towards many who never think of him

[Even before the foundation of the world God determined to remedy the evils which he foresaw sin would bring upon mankind—When our first parents were ruined, and fled from his face, he sought them out and communicated to them
his

his gracious intentions relative to the substitution of his Son, in their stead—And while the Jews were imbruing their hands in the blood of his Son, it was his fixed purpose to pour down his spirit upon them, and to bring them into a state of reconciliation with himself—And have not we also reason to confess, that whatever we either possess or hope for is the result of his purpose and grace which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began.^a?—Yea, who can tell, but that, at this moment, some careless sinner is the object of his special attention, and that this is the very hour, wherein his merciful designs shall be matured and executed?—]

These thoughts of his shall all in due season be accomplished

[It may be a long time before his eternal counsels are manifested by visible and correspondent acts—But not one of his purposes shall ever be frustrated—Paul was “a chosen vessel unto him,” and “separated, in the divine intentions, from his mother’s womb^b :” but how long was he suffered to go on in the most inveterate enmity against Christ and his gospel!—Yet when his hour was come, God stopped him in his mad career, and transformed a bitter persecutor into a zealous apostle—Thus it was that Zaccheus also was made a partaker of Christ’s salvation, when he thought of nothing but gratifying a foolish curiosity^c—And thus many of us also received our first serious impressions, when we were far enough from desiring to fear God—And it is a comfortable reflection, that many, who are yet dead in trespasses and sins, are in the divine purpose “predestinated to the adoption of children^d,” and will one day be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ”—]

Nor shall any expectations founded upon his word be ever disappointed

[Improbable as the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon was, God brought them out at the appointed time—And as he gave “them an expected end,” so will he to all of us—If an ungodly man begin to look unto the Lord Jesus Christ for repentance and remission of sins, he shall not look to him in vain—If an afflicted or tempted soul flee to him for consolation and succour, the desired aid shall not be withheld—Provided only we rely on his word, and not on any presumptuous imaginations of our own, we may rest assured that he will interpose effectually on our behalf—]

But however fixed his purposes may be

II. They

^a 2 Tim. i. 9.

^b Acts ix. 15. Gal. i. 15.

^c Luke xix. 4, 5, 9.

^d Eph. i. 5.

II. They must nevertheless be called forth by the exercise of fervent prayer

God has appointed prayer as the means of obtaining his blessings

[This is the universal voice of scripture, "Ask, and ye shall have"—Even where God most freely promises his blessings, he still says, "Nevertheless I will be enquired of by Israel to do it for them"—We do not say that he never deviates from this method of conveying his mercies; for sometimes "he is found of them that sought him not, and known to them that enquired not after him": But the earnestness with which this duty of prayer is inculcated in the text, is of itself a sufficient proof that we are to expect no blessing without it—God would have us know, and feel our wants; and by opening them before him, get our own hearts affected with them—If at any time he vouchsafe his blessings to those who have not sought him, he instantly stirs them up to prayer, which is as necessary to the welfare of a regenerate soul, as breathing is to the existence of a new-born infant—]

Nor should a discovery of his purposes relax, but rather quicken, our diligence in prayer

[This was the effect which was produced on Daniel as soon as ever he learned that the time fixed for Israel's captivity was near its termination—Nor should it produce any other effect on us—As well might Hezekiah have declined the use of food because God had prolonged his life fifteen years, as we neglect the means of spiritual advancement, if we knew that God had predestinated us unto life—On the contrary, the certain prospect of success is our greatest encouragement to pray, and to comply with any terms which God has prescribed—]

If we use these means aright, we may be sure we shall attain whatsoever his unerring wisdom sees to be good for us

[God has "never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain"^b—On the contrary, he will "hearken" to our cry with parental tenderness, he will discover to the enquiring soul the riches of his grace, and "enable us to comprehend with all saints the heights and depths of his love which passeth knowledge"—But then we must pray in earnest, and "search for him with our *whole heart*"ⁱ—It is not a mere listless petition that will prevail with him; we may "ask and *not* have,

^a Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^f Isai. lxxv. 1.

^b Dan. ix. 2—4.

^h Isai. xlv. 19.

ⁱ Lev. xxvi. 40, 41. Deut. iv. 29.

have, if we thus ask amiss:" but importunate and believing prayer shall bring down every blessing which God himself is able to bestow—]

This subject will be found of peculiar USE

1. To humble the proud

[Every natural man conceives that his salvation must arise solely from his own exertions—But here we are taught to trace all our inclination and ability for what is good to God, who, in the prosecution of his eternal purposes, imparts both the one and the other to our souls^k—Let us learn then to acknowledge him in all that we have received, and to look to him for all that we want—And let the hope, that there may yet be in his heart many undiscovered thoughts of peace towards us, stimulate us to fervent prayer, and diligent exertions—]

2. To awaken the secure

[Some will pervert the truths of God, and say that their exertions are *useless*, if God have not thoughts of peace towards them; and *superfluous*, if he have—But God's decrees are no rule of action for us, seeing that they are hidden from us: it is his precepts, which we are to regard; and if we will not seek him according to his command, we can have no hope that we shall ever find him—Will any man then consign himself deliberately to perdition, because he does not absolutely know that God has "ordained him unto life?"—Should we not justly blame a man who made the uncertainty of life a reason for refusing bodily sustenance? yet he would act as rationally as the other—Let this then be known; the man that lives without God, will die without hope; and, when he perishes, he must accuse, not the hidden purposes of God, but his own folly, sloth, and negligence—]

3. To comfort the feeble-minded

[Some, who are diligent in the use of means, are apt to perplex themselves with doubts respecting the divine decrees—But they have within themselves the very best answer to all their doubts: let them only ask themselves, Whence arose my desires after God? Whence is it that I am enabled to seek him in any measure? the snare will instantly be broken: for, the aid they have already received from God, is a far better ground for concluding that he has designs of peace towards them, than any remaining imperfections can be, of his purpose to reject them—Only then wait upon God in prayer, and rest assured that a praying soul can never perish—Continue to ask, and you shall have; for however secret his purposes may be, his promises are plain and sure: and he says, "Ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart"—]

^k See also Eph. i. 11. and Phil. ii. 13.

CCCXXXI.—THE EFFECTS WHICH NATIONAL MERCIES
SHOULD PRODUCE UPON US.

Ps. cvi. 10—12. *He saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they his words, and sang his praise.*

GRATITUDE for mercies received is a duty universally approved—

Every one sees the propriety of acknowledging personal obligations—

Nor is it less incumbent on us to be thankful for blessings conferred on us in our national capacity—

The words before us record the conduct of the Israelites when a signal deliverance had been vouchsafed to them—

May we be as devoutly, and more abidingly impressed, while we consider

I. The mercy vouchsafed unto them

They had been in a state of extreme danger and distress

[After their departure from Egypt they encamped by the Red Sea—

There they were hemmed in by impassable mountains and morasses—

Pharaoh, greatly incensed, followed them with all his hosts—

Nor doubted but that he should speedily destroy them all—

They, to all appearance, had no means either of escape or self-defence—

And in this situation expected nothing but instant ruin—]

But God vouchsafed them a most astonishing deliverance

[He prevented the nearer approach of Pharaoh by interposing a thick cloud between the Israelites and the Egyptians—

He made a path across the sea, the waters standing as a wall on either side—

He led his people through it as on dry land—

Giving up Pharaoh to judicial blindness and obduracy, he suffered him, at the head of his army, to follow the hosts of Israel—

But, when the Israelites were passed over, he let loose the waves upon their pursuers—

Thus in an instant were the Egyptian armies overwhelmed—
And Israel saw their enemies dead upon the sea shore—

How wonderful was this interposition of the Deity, and how great the obligation conferred by it!—]

Nor were they at the time insensible of the kindness manifested to them

II. The effects produced by it

They had shewed themselves an ungrateful and unbelieving people—

But now, for a season, they were greatly changed

1. They believed God's word

[They had had reason enough before to believe the promises made to them—

Moses had confirmed his word by many stupendous miracles—

But they no sooner came into difficulty than they renewed their murmurs—

Now, however, they were forced to confess the power and faithfulness of God—

Nor did they suppose that they should ever yield to unbelief again—]

2. They sang his praise

[The salvation afforded them was inexpressibly great—

And the hand of God in it was too visible to be overlooked—

However therefore they might pity the individuals who perished, they could not but rejoice in their own safety—

Nor could they refrain from praising him who had wrought their deliverance—

The most obdurate could not but feel; the most insensible could not but admire—

Happy would it have been for them if they had always continued in this mind—

But though, through frailty, they soon relinquished this heavenly temper, the effect, while it lasted, was good and suitable—]

IMPROVEMENT

1. Let us endeavour to get our minds duly impressed with the *temporal* deliverances vouchsafed to us *as a nation*

[We must be blind indeed if we see not the hand of God in the repeated victories which we have lately gained—

Though they have not been either so miraculous or so complete as that recorded in the text, they demand our most grateful acknowledgments—

Had they been as numerous and decisive in favour of our enemies as they have been on our part, we should before this time have seen this land the theatre of war—

Let us then praise and adore our God for his interposition on our behalf—

Nor let us soon forget the wonders he has wrought for us—

Let us rather turn to him in an humble dependence on his mercy—

Let us plead the promises he has made to all penitent and believing people—

And let us, in faith and penitence, expect the accomplishment of his word—]

2. Let us take occasion also to bless him for the *spiritual* deliverance wrought for us *as individuals*

[Our danger from the broken law was far greater than from human foes—

There was no possible method of escape, if God had not interposed for us—

But he has opened a way for us through the death of his own Son—

And utterly vanquished all the enemies of our salvation—

Let every heart and every tongue unite in his praise—

Nor let the remembrance of his mercy be ever effaced from our minds—

But let his word, whereby he encourages sinners, be our hope—

Then shall every fresh victory be a pledge of future triumphs—

And the final destruction of our enemies be the subject of eternal praise.]

CCCXXXII. THANKSGIVING FOR GREAT DELIVERANCE.

Ps. cxxiv. 1—8. *If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, now may Israel say; If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

THE

* This Psalm is with peculiar propriety read on the *fifth* of November.

THE Psalmist, after some great deliverance either from foreign enemies or civil insurrection, records, for the instruction and encouragement of the church in all ages, the goodness of God towards him. The precise occasion on which it was penned, is not known. Instead therefore of dwelling on historical events, which, as applied to the Psalm, must be at best conjectural, we shall take occasion from the Psalm to set before you, in reference to the solemnities of this day,

I. Matter for devout acknowledgment

[To illustrate this, two things are to be considered ;

1. Our danger ; which, like that alluded to in the Psalm itself has been *imminent*^a— — — *irresistible*^b— — — *tremendous*^c— — —

2. Our deliverance ; which, like that which is here celebrated, has been *sudden*^d— — — and *effectual*^e— — —]

II. Our duty arising from it

[This is comprised in two things

1. Gratitude—The language of all our hearts should be, “ Blessed be the Lord ^f” — — —

2. Affiance—We should in all future difficulties hope and trust in God as our almighty Protector ^g— — —]

APPLICATION

[However thankful we may be for our national mercies, we must not forget, that there is yet more abundant cause for joy on account of our deliverance from sin and Satan, death and hell, through the mediation and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ— — — Let the greatness of our danger, and the perfection of our deliverance, be the subject of our daily contemplations, that we may trust in Jesus with our whole hearts, and praise him with our whole souls— — —]

^a The number of our enemies (like a flood, ver. 4, 5.) their inverte-
racy against us (ver. 3.) and the combination of circumstances at
the time of the mutiny, well illustrate this.

^b What if God had not been so decidedly for us (mark the repeti-
tion, ver. 1, 2.) in some of our naval engagements? If only *half* of
our victories had terminated as much in favour of the enemy, how
different would have been our state, especially when all Europe was
combined against us !

^c Torn in pieces (ver. 6.) and swallowed up (ver. 3—5.)

^d Review the changes in the North ; and our escape is indeed like
that of a bird that gets out after having been already caught in the
fowler's net, ver. 7.

^e Peace is established ; and the snare itself (the principles which
occasioned the war) is broken. Ib.

^f Ver. 6.

^g Ver 8.

CCCXXXIII. GOD'S INTERPOSITIONS SEASONABLE.

Zech. xiv. 7. *It shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.*

IT often happens that passages of Scripture, which are obscure in some points of view, are in other respects both clear and profitable. Of this kind is the passage before us. Commentators are by no means agreed about the precise events to which the prophet refers in the preceding and following context. We shall not attempt therefore to explain what perhaps no one perfectly understands; but shall confine ourselves to such observations as will elucidate the text in those points which are more plain and obvious. We shall point out

I. Its prophetic reference

Whatever be the immediate event alluded to, it evidently refers to

1. The apostolic period

[Our Lord, whose advent and death are so clearly foretold in the foregoing chapter ^a, seems to be spoken of in this place. The time of his ministry was “a day neither clear nor dark ^b.” The sun was risen; but it was eclipsed by clouds: the light of his instructions shined in the land; but it was greatly obscured by the shadows of the Mosaic ritual.

By the death of Christ the light seemed to be altogether removed; and the darkness of despair succeeded the dawn of hope. His own disciples were confounded, and gave up all for lost ^c. But behold, by his resurrection, their hopes were revived; by his converse with them for forty days, their minds were led to see the accomplishment of all the prophecies relating to him: and by his ascension “*from the mount of Olives* ^d,” together with the express commission that he gave them just previous to his departure, they were enabled to wait for his promised Spirit; on the descent of which a light was kindled, that never was, nor ever will be, extinguished.]

2. The millennial period

[Before the gospel shall universally prevail, there will be
a season

^a Zech. xiii. 1.

^b Ver. 6.

^c Luke xxiv. 21.

^d Compare Acts i. 9, 12. with ver. 4. which is thought to be a prophecy that after Christ's ascension from the mount of Olives a way should be opened for the Gentiles to come into the church of Christ. See Luke iii. 5, 6.

a season of great darkness in the church of Christ. By whatever it may be accomplished, whether by means of infidelity or Popish superstition, we are taught to expect that there will be a dreadful defection from the faith of the gospel, as well as a general prevalence of iniquity throughout the world^e. But then, even while gross darkness is covering the people, shall a light suddenly arise upon the world, and one bright day be visible in either hemisphere^f. The church itself shall be quite astonished at the suddenness of the change, which will pass like lightning from one end of the world even to the other^g, insomuch that accommodations will be wanted for the multitudes of worshippers in every place^h.]

But this prophecy, like numberless others, may be further improved by considering

II. Its spiritual application

Prophecies have different degrees, and different seasons, of accomplishment. And the apostolic writers sometimes speak of them in an *accommodated sense*, and apply them to events to which they had not any direct referenceⁱ. We would not be understood to say, that the prophet had any the remotest reference to the concerns of our nation: but in an accommodated sense we may say, that they have been remarkably verified at this time^k— — Not however to insist any longer on this, we may properly affirm that they are frequently accomplished in the souls of men;

1. In their first conversion

[To what an astonishing length of wickedness are many suffered to proceed before God interposes to stop their career! The apostle Paul seemed to have attained almost the summit

^e 2 Thess. ii. 3, 8. 1 Tim. iv. 1. Matt. xxiv. 10—14. Perhaps also Dan xi. 32—36. may refer to this as well as to what is past.

^f Isai. lx. 1—3. with ver. 9, 20, 21.

^g Matt. xxiv. 27.

^h Isai. xlix. 18—23.

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 15, with Matt. ii. 18.; Isai. liii. 4. with Matt. viii. 17.

^k If this were a *Thanksgiving Sermon for the Peace*, it would be proper to mention here, 1. The fluctuations of success during the war (it has “not been all day, or all night,” ver. 6.) 2. The dark season that had arrived (our allies conquered; the northern confederacy; all Europe against us; the discontent in Ireland; and, in the midst of this dreadful storm, the helm deserted by the pilot; the king himself so indisposed as to be unable to hold the reins of government; and the nation almost in a state of famine.) 3. The sudden deliverance we have experienced (by the victories at Copenhagen and in Egypt, the dissolution of the Northern league, and the restoration of peace and plenty.)

of impiety before God arrested him in his course¹: and the dying thief seemed to be gone almost beyond redemption, when Jesus at his last hour converted and saved his soul^m.

Many too are reduced to the very borders of despair, before they are enabled to apply the promises of the gospel for the comfort of their souls. The description given of those in Ezekielⁿ, and of those in the 107th Psalm^o, exactly accords with the experience of many. But "in the evening time it is light:" and "when their tongue faileth for thirst, then God opens to them rivers in high places and fountains in the midst of the valleys^p."]

2. In their subsequent walk with God

[Deep are the distresses which many of God's people endure through temptation or spiritual desertion. Exceeding bitter are the complaints of David upon this subject^q, as are those of holy Job^r. But in their extremity God heard their cry: and when there seemed to be no prospect of any thing but of increasing misery, or of utter destruction, then God appeared for them to their unspeakable consolation^s. Thus it is with many others at this day. To the wicked, their sun often sets at noon-day^t: but to the righteous it is promised, that their sun, if need be, shall arise at midnight^u.]

We may IMPROVE this subject

1. For caution

[Though God glorifies himself frequently by interposing his power in the last extremity for the conversion of men, we are not therefore to run into great excesses in expectation of deliverance from them; or to defer our repentance to the time of death, in hopes that God will call us at the eleventh hour. This would be a dangerous experiment indeed: and God forbid that we should ever subject ourselves to so great a risk. The word of God calls upon us to turn to him without delay^x. Let us consider, that with respect to the continuance of our lives, or to the continued offers of divine grace, it may be evening already. Surely with many of us "the day is far spent; and it is high time that we awake out of sleep^y." Let us then pray that the day-star may arise in our hearts^z, and that instead of having our lamp extinguished in darkness, "a light may arise to us in obscurity, and our darkness be as the noon-day^a."]

2. For

¹ 1 Tim. i. 13. Acts xxvi. 10, 11. ^m Matt. xxvii. 44.
ⁿ Ezek. xxxvii. 11, 12. ^o Throughout. ^p Isai. xli. 17, 18.
^q Ps. xlii. 6, 7. lxxvii. 1—9. lxxxviii. 3—7. 14—16. cii. 1—10.
^r Job vi. 4. et passim. ^s Ps. cxvi. 3—6. Job xlii. 7—12.
^t Amos viii. 9, 10. ^u Ps. cxii. 4. ^x Heb. iii. 7, 8.
^y Rom. xiii. 11, 12. ^z 2 Pet. i. 19. ^a Isai. lviii. 10.

“against the Holy One of Israel^a”—Now there is no sin, whether against the first or second table of the law, which has not abounded in this land— — — Nor is there any rank or order of men, from the highest to the lowest, that have not yielded up themselves as willing servants to sin and Satan— — — Even the flock of Christ itself, both the Pastors who watch over it, and the people who compose it, have contributed in no small degree to the tremendous mass of iniquity, that has incensed our God against us — — —]

2. In our individual capacity

[Since a sight of others' sins rarely begets any true humiliation in us, let each of us in particular search out his own— Let our thoughts, words, and actions be strictly scrutinized— Let those sins which are more immediately against God, be enquired into; our pride, our impenitence, our unbelief, our ingratitude for temporal blessings, and especially for the unspeakable gift of God's dear Son; our obstinate resistance of God's holy Spirit, together with all our neglect of duties, or our coldness in the performance of them; let these be counted up, and be set in order before us; and the very best of men will see cause for the deepest humiliation; yea, we shall wonder that we have not long since been made like to Sodom and Gomorrah—]

Having taken a view of our sins, let us contrast with them

II. The mercies God has vouchsafed to us

Justly have we deserved to be entirely abandoned by our God

[The history of the Jews shews us what we might well expect at his hands—He himself bids us go to Shiloh, and see what he did to it for the wickedness of his people^b—Indeed the whole of his dealings with them in their Assyrian and Babylonish captivity, and in their present dispersion, may teach us what we might well expect at his hands— —]

But he has not dealt with us according to our desert

[He has “not forsaken us” *as a nation*—In proof of this, we appeal to the comparative lightness of our troubles—the signal interpositions with which we have been favoured in the midst of our troubles—and lastly, the happy termination of them, by a seasonable restoration both of peace and plenty^c—

Nor has he forsaken us *as individuals*—He is yet calling us by his word, and striving with us by his Spirit—And we behold amongst us the evident tokens of his presence, in that
sinners

^a Ps. li. 4.

^b Jer. vii. 12. with 1 Sam. iv. 10, 11.

^c Oct. 4th, 1801.

sinner are yet awakened to repentance, and saints are edified in faith and love—]

ADDRESS

1. Let the long-suffering of God be gratefully acknowledged

[We should “account the long-suffering of God to be salvation^d.” Let us not, however, rest in carnal mirth; but let his temporal mercies to our land, and his spiritual mercies to our souls, call forth our liveliest gratitude and our devoutest praise—]

Let it also be practically improved

[In the words immediately following our text, the Prophet says, “Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his own soul.” It was the duty of the Jews to cast off their bondage as soon as God should open a way for their escape. Thus must we also cast off the servitude in which we have been detained, and go forth from amongst all the enemies of God—if we continue in sin, we must take our portion with the ungodly—But if we give up ourselves unreservedly to God, he will blot out our past iniquities in the blood of his Son, and make us partakers of an everlasting salvation—]

^d 2 Pet. iii. 15.

CCCXXXV. THE DUTY AND GROUNDS OF PRAISE.

Ps. cvii. 8, 9. *Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works unto the children of men! for he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*

AMONG the various graces which characterize the true Christian, that of gratitude to God is very conspicuous. Others indeed will confess their obligations to the Supreme Being; but none are duly sensible of them, till they have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. When once we have “tasted that the Lord is gracious,” and been impressed with a sense of redeeming love, we shall view the goodness of God in all his dispensations; and, not only glorify him ourselves, but earnestly desire that all should render him the honour due unto his name.

This

This disposition was eminently displayed in David, when he penned the Psalm before us. No less than four times does he repeat the fervent wish, that men would praise the Lord: and at each time does he suggest the most ample grounds for the performance of that duty.

From his words we shall take occasion to consider

I. The duty of praising God

Wherever a superior Being is acknowledged, there a tribute of prayer and praise is considered as due to him. The light of revelation confirms this general sentiment; and expressly inculcates thanksgiving to God as an universal and indispensable duty. The manner in which the Psalmist urges us to praise our heavenly Benefactor, deserves peculiar attention: it speaks more forcibly than the strongest injunction could have done; and intimates that praise is

1. An important duty

[There is not any precept in the Bible more plain than those which relate to this subject^a— — There is not any duty, the neglect of which is represented in a more heinous light^b— — On the other hand, there is not any religious act of which more honourable mention is made than this^c— — Nor any to which, *if accompanied with a suitable deportment*, more exalted privileges are annexed^d— — Hence it is, that thirteen times in the space of six short verses, David renews his exhortations to every living creature to praise the Lord^e.]

2. A delightful duty

[Praise necessarily presupposes an elevated state of mind: in fact, it is only the external expression whereby a soul, filled with admiration and gratitude, gives vent to its feelings. It is an exercise of which the glorified saints and angels are never weary^f; and in which we enjoy a foretaste of heaven itself^g— — Words can scarcely convey a more sublime idea of this employment, than those by which David describes its effects upon the soul^h— — In this view he strongly recommends it to us, and we may also recommend it to each other, as "*good, pleasant, and comely*"ⁱ.]

3. A much

^a 1 Thess. v. 18. Eph. v. 20.

^b It is the strongest mark of an ungodly state, Rom. i. 21; and a certain ground of eternal condemnation, Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

^c It glorifies God, Ps. l. 23.

^d Ib.

^e Ps. cl.

^f Rev. iv. 8, 9.

^g 1 Pet. i. 8. *χαρᾶ διδοξασμένῃ.*

^h Ps. lxxiii. 5.

ⁱ Ps. cxlvii. 1.

3. A much neglected duty

[The generality of men, instead of acknowledging with gratitude God's kindness towards them, and requiting him according to the benefits he has vouchsafed to them, take occasion from his mercies to sin the more against him— — Not even the godly themselves abound in this holy employment as we might expect. Many, alas! live at so great a distance from God, that they can scarcely ever rise above a petition for mercy, or, at most, a sense of thankfulness that he has not utterly cast them off. They cannot soar to a contemplation of the divine perfections, or of the excellency of Christ, or of the blessedness of those mansions that are prepared for them. They have so much of the world in their hearts, and so little faith, that they cannot realize their principles, or glorify God in any measure as they ought. Instead of cultivating the devout spirit of David^k, they rest satisfied in a lukewarm state, saying, "It is high; I cannot attain unto it!" Yes; though there are some who delight themselves in God, yet, in reference to the greater part even of real Christians we must say with sorrow and regret, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and according to his excellent greatness^m!"]

To stir up ourselves to a due performance of this duty, let us consider

II. The grounds and reasons of it

There is nothing that may not in some view or other be made a ground of praise and thanksgiving. In the text we are led to notice

1. The blessings of God's providence

[The goodness of God as manifested in the wonderful dispensations of his providence, deserves our most attentive consideration. How bountifully does he supply the returning wants of his creatures even while they are continuing in rebellion against him! How marvellously has he preserved us in life from our earliest infancy to this day, and kept in tune, as it were, in the midst of continual shocks and dangers, an instrument of ten thousand strings! With what kindness has he restrained the evil dispositions of men, which, if suffered to rage without control, would produce a very hell upon earthⁿ! As for the godly, they would soon be extirpated from the face of the earth, if the sons of Belial were permitted to execute all that is in their hearts. And who amongst us would
not

^k Ps. lxxiii. 3, 4. and cxix. 164. ^l Ps. cxxxix. 6. ^m Ps. cl. 2.

ⁿ In proof of this we need only look back to the slaughters and massacres, the rapes and ravages, and all the other horrors of the French Revolution.

not have perpetrated many more evils than he has, if God had not imposed an invisible restraint upon us, and diverted us from our purpose^o?

But on this occasion we must particularly call to mind the wonders God has wrought for us, in preserving us from domestic tumults and foreign invasions; and in making us victorious, when our allies have been all subdued, or have even combined against us with the common enemy for our destruction. In a more especial manner should we admire the goodness of God in so suddenly disposing the hearts of our enemies to peace, and in bringing the calamities both of war and scarcity to a happy termination.]

2. The riches of his grace

[Under the image of a weary traveller rescued from the deepest distress, and brought beyond all expectation to the rest he had desired, the Psalmist represents a soul hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and raised from a state of despondency to the full enjoyment of its God. Thousands there are who are reduced to great perplexity in the pursuit of heaven. They feel their guilty and perishing condition; but how to extricate themselves from the wilderness of this world, and to find their way to the city of habitation, they know not. Having tried in vain those self-righteous methods of escape which their own reason has suggested, they cry at last to God, and implore his guidance. He, ever ready to hear the prayer of the poor destitute, “reveals his dear Son in their hearts:” he shews them that in Christ is their hope, in Christ is their refuge, in Christ is their security. Being thus led to Christ, their “longing souls are satisfied, their hungry souls are filled with goodness” — — —

And is not this a ground of praise? If any who have experienced such mercies, “should hold their peace, would not the very stones cry out against them?” The more we contemplate redeeming love, the more will a sacred ardour glow within our bosoms to bless and praise the Lord^p.]

ADDRESS

1. Those who never praise God at all

[What enemies are such persons both to their present and future happiness! How much richer enjoyment would they now have of all God's mercies, if they could discern his hand in them, and taste his love! And how much happier would they be in the eternal world! for, can it be supposed that God will bestow heaven indiscriminately on the evil and unthankful together with the good and thankful? Can it be thought that a man who was more insensible of favours than an

^o See the instances of Abimelech, Gen. xx. 6; of Laban, Gen. xxxi. 24; of David, 1 Sam. xxv. 32-34.

^p Ver. 43.

an ox or an ass ^a, shall instantly on his dismissal from the body begin to adore his God, and to join in those celestial anthems for which he had not the smallest taste? No: we must begin on earth the work we are to carry on in heaven: nor can we hope to participate the felicity of the saints, if we have not first cultivated their disposition, and found delight in their employment.]

2. Those who desire and endeavour to praise him

[While some find their hearts enlarged in praising God, we trust there are many who say, Oh that I *could* praise the Lord for his goodness! But whence is it that, with a desire to enjoy God, so many spend their days in sighing and mourning instead of in joy and rejoicing? Perhaps they pore over their own corruptions without contemplating the divine attributes: they look at themselves more than at Christ: they consider their own wants; but overlook the Lord's promises: they anticipate future difficulties, without adverting to past deliverances: in short, they cannot praise God as they would wish, because they are forgetful of those benefits which are the occasions and grounds of praise. Let all such persons then be aware of their error. Let them begin this day the important, the delightful, the long-neglected work. Let them unite in praising God for his mercies, whether public or personal, whether temporal or eternal.

To all would we say, in the energetic language of the Psalmist, "O sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing praises unto the Lord, sing praises; sing ye praises with understanding^r. Let young men and maidens, old men and children, praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heavens^s."]]

^a Isai. i. 3.

^r Ps. xlvii. 6, 7.

^s Ps. cxlviii. 12, 13.

CCCXXXVI. THE DUTY OF THANKFULNESS FOR GOD'S
MERCIES.

Zeph. iii. 14, 15. *Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord hath taken away thy judgments.*

THE dispensations of Providence, if duly noticed, afford continual occasion for joy and gratitude. Even afflictions themselves are sent us by God rather as expressions of his love than as tokens of his wrath: much
more

more therefore must the removal of his paternal chastisements be regarded as a ground of praise and thanksgiving. The exhortation before us speaks to this effect; and naturally leads us to consider

I. The ground we have for thankfulness

The expressions in the text, though apparently relating to past events, were used in the prophetic manner to declare things which should be accomplished at a future period, namely, the restoration of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon, and their conversion to Christianity in the latter day.

The judgments that have been removed from us are also of two kinds,

1. Temporal [— — —^a]
2. Spiritual

[Ignorance of vital religion, and subjection to sin and Satan, are far more calamitous in their nature than any temporal judgments, and more universal in their influence. The pressure of our temporal evils has been felt but partially; but that which is infinitely more grievous has reached to every individual of the human race — — —]

But from some amongst us God has actually removed these judgments: he has “made them a name and a praise amongst all who behold them, and has turned back their captivity before their eyes^b ;” or, in other words, he has “turned them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God^c” — — —

After the prophet's example, we may address in similar language even those who have never yet experienced the full efficacy of divine grace: for God has provided “a Saviour for them, and *that* a great One^d.” He “has laid help upon One that is mighty^e :” and, if any continue in darkness and the shadow of death, or be yet led captive by their spiritual enemies, the fault is utterly their own: God has “raised up an horn of salvation for them^f ;” and, if they will but trust in Jesus, their complete deliverance is as certain as if it were already effected^g.]

While the prophet thus sets before us the grounds of thankfulness, he strongly intimates also

II. The

^a Here the particular judgments which have been removed, whether *war, famine, or pestilence*, should be stated, together with the circumstances that rendered them most afflictive.

^b Ver. 20.

^c Acts xxvi. 18.

^d Isai. xix. 20.

^e Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^f Luke i. 68, 69.

^g Isai. xlv. 22.

II. The manner in which we should express it

It is surely no cold or merely external expression of gratitude that such deliverances call for: our thankfulness should accord with the deliverances themselves

1. In their nature

[There is nothing in outward festivity that is at all abhorrent from the precepts of our religion, provided we conduct ourselves with temperance and sobriety^h. An external celebration of victory, or of peace, or of an abundant harvest, will certainly consist with the fear of Godⁱ. Such things indeed become sinful when they draw us into the spirit of the world, or lead us to seek our happiness in earthly vanities: but, when they are *used merely as expressions of our gratitude to God*, there is nothing in them unworthy of the Christian character^k.

That, however, which both our temporal and spiritual mercies most demand, is a thankful heart. It is by this *exclusively* that we are to make our acknowledgments for spiritual mercies: and, in comparison of this, all outward demonstrations of joy are vain, yea, even hateful in the sight of God.]

2. In their degree

[The deliverances which we have been now considering, are great beyond all conception. Even those of a temporal nature can scarcely be estimated too highly — — — But those which have been vouchsafed to our souls, what words can adequately express them; or what imagination can fully comprehend them? Doubtless then the prophet's exhortation, animated as it is, requires no more of us than the occasion justly demands. We should "sing, and shout, and rejoice with all our hearts." Such should ever be the frame of our minds: for though our temporal blessings are only occasional, our spiritual mercies are renewed day by day: *they* never wax old; nor should the remembrance of them be ever effaced from our minds: "the sacrifices of praise should be offered up continually^l;" and the fire that kindles them on the altar of our hearts, be never suffered to go out^m.]

We will not conclude without some ADDITIONAL IMPROVEMENT

1. For caution

[The judgments which have been removed, were sent by God as the punishment of sinⁿ. And though he has taken them away from us at the present, we know not how soon he may inflict them again even with sevenfold greater weight, if we

^h 1 Cor. x. 27.
Heb. xiii. 15.

ⁱ Esth. ix. 22.
^m Lev. vi. 13.

^k Gen. xxi. 8.
ⁿ Ezek. xiv. 21.

we be unmindful of the ends for which they were sent^o. Let us then turn from those sins which have provoked the Lord to anger: and, while a dread of his wrath deters us from repeating our former transgressions^p, let a sense of his goodness constrain us to render him a cheerful and unreserved obedience^q.]

2. For reproof

[Many, it is to be feared, feel but little gratitude to God for the removal of sore judgments. They join perhaps in the outward expressions of joy on account of our temporal deliverances; but they despise the gratitude that is expressed for spiritual mercies, and would account a strict compliance with the injunctions in the text as no better than the effervescence of a heated imagination, or perhaps the wild effusions of a maniac. But these, whatever they be in profession, are atheists in practice; and, though they participate in our national mercies, they are utter strangers to any spiritual blessing: yea rather, the heaviest curses hang over their devoted heads^r. How awfully are all such persons condemned in the text! Let them reflect well upon their unhappy state: for if once they feel God's judgments in the eternal world, they will never have to shout for a removal, no, nor for a mitigation of them, to all eternity.]

3. For encouragement

[Many have been the prayers offered to God under our late calamities: and we trust that he has heard the supplications of his people, and sent us a deliverance in answer to their prayers. Let us learn then to plead with him for a removal of all our judgments whether temporal or spiritual. So shall the afflictions of this present life be either removed or sanctified; and our joy in God be a foretaste of that happiness which shall speedily arrive, and be enjoyed by us without mixture, intermission, or end.]

^o Lev. xxvi. 18, 21, 24, 28.

^p Ezra ix. 13, 14.

^q Rom. ii. 4. and 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^r Ps. xxviii. 5. Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

CCCXXXVII. TRUST IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. xxi. 7. *The king trusteth in the Lord; and, through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.*

THERE is an inseparable connexion between the duties and privileges of a Christian--

It is his privilege to enjoy composure under all difficulties and dangers—

But this he cannot possess, unless he repose his confidence in God—

Nevertheless in relying upon God his mind shall be kept in perfect peace—

David had known the storms of trouble as much as any man—

But in the midst of all maintained a full assurance of divine protection—

He records his experience in the words before us—

We shall consider them

I. According to their original import

This Psalm, like many other parts of scripture, has a double sense—

In an *historical* view it speaks of David himself

[David had long been habituated to trust in the Lord—

When he was yet a boy, he withstood a lion and a bear in dependence upon God^a—

Nor feared to encounter him, who filled all the hosts of Israel with terror^b—

During the persecutions of Saul he still held fast his confidence—

And, under the most imminent danger and accumulated trouble, encouraged himself in God^c—

Sometimes indeed his faith for a moment began to fail him^d—

But, on the whole, he was “strong in faith, giving glory to God”—

Nor was he less sensible of his own insufficiency when he was a king—

He still made the Most High his only and continual refuge^e—

And God approved himself faithful to his believing servant—

There were indeed some occasions wherein David was greatly “moved^f”—

But these only served more fully to evince the power and faithfulness of his God^g—]

In a *prophetical* sense the words are applicable to Christ

[The

^a 1 Sam. xvii. 36, 37.

^b Ib. xlv. 47.

^c Ib. xxx. 6.

^d Ib. xxvii. 1.

^e Ps. xci. 2. and lvi. 2—4.

^f 2 Sam. xv. 30.

^g Ib. xxiii. 5.

[The whole Psalm has an evident reference to the Messiah—

Christ is that “King” who was raised to sit upon the throne of David^b—

And, as for every other good thing, so was he eminent for trust in God—

He disregarded the plots of his most powerful enemiesⁱ—

And, undaunted, renewed his visit to those who had lately sought to stone him^k—

He well knew that, till his hour was come, no power on earth could touch him^l—

Nor was he ever left destitute of the divine protection—

He seemed indeed to be “moved” when “he was crucified through weakness”—

But he soon shewed how vain were the attempts of his adversaries—

In his resurrection and ascension he “led captivity itself captive”—

And he will in due season “put all his enemies under his feet”—]

In both these views the text sets before us an instructive example

But we may consider it further

II. In reference to the present occasion

The solemnities of this day prove that the former part of the text is exemplified also in our own monarch^m

We may therefore hope that the latter part also shall be accomplished in him

[The religious conduct of kings is of great importance to a nation—

Their piety indeed is not more meritorious than that of others—

But it is often more beneficial to the community than that of a private person—

In the days of old, God paid especial regard to the prayers of princesⁿ—

Even when they were of an abandoned character, he heard them^o—

How

^b Luke i. 32.

^k John xi. 8.

ⁱ Ib. xiii. 32.

^l Ib. xix. 11.

^m This was preached on occasion of the king going to St. Paul's to present the colours taken in three different engagements with the French, Spanish, and Dutch fleets.

ⁿ 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12. & xx. 5, 6, 12, 15, 17. & xxxiv. 27; and Isai. xxxvii. 21, 22, 33, 34.

^o 1 Kings xxi. 29.

How much more may we hope that he will respect those offered to him this day!—

“The mercy of the Most High” has hitherto been signally manifested towards us—

And if we trust in him it shall yet be continued to us—

We say not indeed but that, as a nation, we may be greatly moved—

It is certain that we deserve the heaviest calamities that can fall upon us—

But we shall not be given up to ruin if we cry unto God for help—

To the end of the world shall that promise be fulfilled to repenting nations^p—]

Sure we are that they who trust in God for spiritual blessings shall never be disappointed

[Our thoughts on this occasion are not to be confined to temporal concerns—

Much as we are interested in national mercies, the welfare of our souls is yet more important—

Yea, our spiritual progress is the great means of obtaining God’s protection to the state—

Trust in God therefore, for spiritual blessings is not foreign to the business of this day—

Whatever our political sentiments may be, we are all equally concerned to seek acceptance through Christ—

We all need to trust in the promises made to us in him—

And, if we do, “the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail against us”—

Though we have been led captive by our lusts, “we shall have redemption through his blood”—

And though we have still to conflict with sin and Satan, we shall be made more than conquerors—

The mercy of the Most High shall assuredly be extended to us—

Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than that promise fail of accomplishment^q—]

APPLICATION

[Let us habituate ourselves to view the hand of God in all our mercies—

And to trust in him both for personal and national blessings—

But let us not think, we trust in God, when in reality we do not—

Trust in God necessarily implies a renunciation of all creature-confidence—

It

^p Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

^q 2 Chron. xx. 20.

It also supposes that we sincerely commit our cause to God—

And that we plead the promises made to us in his word—

If we seek not the Lord in this manner, we trust rather in chance, or in our own vain conceits, than in him—

Let us then be earnest in our applications at the throne of grace—

Let us be exceeding thankful to God for the mercies we have received—

And in every difficulty, temporal or spiritual, confide in him—

Thus shall we see an happy issue to our present troubles—

And be monuments of God's truth and faithfulness to all eternity—]

CCCXXXVIII. THE EQUITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE.

2 Chron. xv. 2. *And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.*

AS in a season of affliction it may be sometimes necessary to blend reproof with consolation, so in a season of joy and triumph it may sometimes be proper to temper our congratulations with prudential advice. When Asa was returning with his victorious army after the destruction of his Ethiopian enemies, the Prophet Oded was sent forth to meet him, and was directed by God himself not to salute him with fulsome compliments, but to impress upon his mind a salutary admonition.

In this concise and pointed address we see

I. The rule of God's procedure

God is not necessarily bound by any rules; for he both may do, and actually "does, according to his own will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth:" yet has he been pleased to prescribe rules to himself

1. In the dispensations of his providence

[The Jews, as God's peculiar people, were governed by him according to the strictest rules of equity. They were taught to look for temporal rewards or punishments according

as they were obedient or disobedient to his word : and their whole history may serve to illustrate the correspondence there was between their dealings towards him, and his towards them ^a— — — Indeed, God himself expresses peculiar jealousy on this head ; and appeals to them, whether the inequality which there was in his providence, did not originate in themselves ; and whether it was not perfectly agreeable to the rules which he had established for his conduct towards them ^b.

Somewhat of the same procedure is yet visible in the dispensations of God towards us. Nations at this time are often prospered or punished according as they pay due allegiance to God, or revolt from him : and individuals, not unfrequently experience even here a recompence suited to their conduct. But as, under the law, God sometimes deviated from this rule, in order to direct the views of men to a future day of retribution ^c, so now he has laid it aside in a great degree, in order that our motives to action may be more spiritual, and that we may look forward to the day of judgment as the period fixed for the display of his righteousness, and for the rewarding of our actions.]

2. In the communications of his grace

[God's conduct towards the Jews in respect of temporal things was intended to shadow forth his dealings with us in respect of spiritual things. In relation to these we may see, that the rule which God has laid down to himself is almost invariably observed. It is true, that he is often "found of them that sought him not:" but when once he has revealed himself to any man, he regulates himself towards him according to a principle of perfect equity, rewarding him for his fidelity, or punishing him for his neglect. Who amongst his people ever sought his face in vain? Who ever diligently walked with him in a state of humble dependence, and did not find God with him in the tokens of his love, and the supports of his grace? God indeed reserves in his power the times and the seasons when he shall reveal himself more fully to the soul; and he apportions to every one such trials as he in his wisdom knows will be productive of good: but he never did, nor ever will, forsake them that seek him ^d.

On the other hand, who is there that has not experienced the hidings of God's face, when fresh contracted guilt, or repeated neglect of duty, has given him offence? Who has not

^a See this exemplified in Asa, 2 Chron. xiv. 5—7, 11, 12. and xv. 10—15, 19. with xvi. 7—9; in Jehosaphat, xvii. 3—6, 10. & xx. 3. 30. with xix. 2. & xx. 35—37; in Joash, xxiv. 20.

^b Compare Ezek. xviii. 24—29. with Lev. xxvi. 3—45. and Deut. xxxi. 16, 17.

^c Ps. lxxiii. 3—14.

^d Ps. ix. 10.

not found on such occasions God has withdrawn the aids of his Spirit both in public and private ordinances; and perhaps left him for a season to the power and influence of his own corruptions? We know indeed that God has said, he will not finally cast off his people^e: and we believe he will not: we believe he will “visit them with the rod” till he has brought them back to him with deep contrition^f: but as long as they forsake him, he will, as far as respects any manifestations of his favour, forsake them; and if any who have thought themselves his people, forsake him utterly, they shall also be utterly abandoned by him. Nor can any be assured that they themselves shall not suffer eternal dereliction, any longer than their adherence to God justifies the hope that they are his children.]

To impress this rule the more deeply on our minds, let us consider

II. The universal importance of it

The Prophet in a most solemn manner called the attention both of the king and all his army to the subject before us; intimating thereby, that there were none who were not interested in it, nor any occasion when the consideration of it would not be useful to their souls.

It is suited to us

1. In prosperity

[Of this there can be no doubt, since it was in a season of peculiar triumph that the prophet was sent to give this admonition. Indeed we are never more apt to forget ourselves, yea, to forget God also, than when we are elated with great prosperity. We are apt to “sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drag^g.” When “Jeshurun waxed fat, he kicked^h :” when “Uzziah was made strong, his heart was lifted up to his destructionⁱ.” Strange as it may seem, even the manifestations of God’s love to the soul are calculated to puff us up with pride, if we have not some thorn in the flesh given us to counteract this evil tendency, and to keep us from abusing the divine mercies^k. The more sail a ship carries, the more ballast it requires. The very deliverance that Asa had experienced was likely to render him careless and secure, as though he were now beyond the reach of harm. But by this admonition he was taught, that his security was in
God

^e 1 Sam. xii. 22. Heb. xiii. 5. Isai. liv. 7—10.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

^g Hab. i. 10.

^h Deut. xxvii. 15.

ⁱ 2 Chron. xxvi. 5, 16.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 7.

God alone, and that he must continue to “walk humbly with God,” if he would have the divine protection continued to him.

Similar admonitions are also given to us, to counteract the pride of our hearts. “Be not high-minded, but fear^l.” “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^m.” “Blessed is the man that feareth alwaysⁿ.” Even the great Apostle himself, though he knew himself to be a chosen vessel unto God, yet felt the necessity of “keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should become a cast-away^o.” Let us therefore exercise the same caution; and, whether we rejoice on account of national or personal mercies, “rejoice with trembling^p.”]

2. In adversity

[As in prosperous circumstances we need to be guarded against presumption, so in heavy trials we need to be cautioned against despondency. If we appear to be forsaken of our God, we are apt to think that he has altogether “shut up his tender mercies, and will be favourable to us no more^q.” But in the words before us we see, that no nation or individual can be in so low a state, but that their recovery is certain if they only wait upon God. He will assuredly be found of them that seek him: yea, at the very time that they perhaps are bewailing his absence, he “is actually present *with them*,” working in them that very contrition, and enabling them to wait upon him, when their unassisted nature would have fainted in despair.

Let every one then apply to himself the text in this view. Are we ignorant? let us look to God for the teachings of his Spirit. Are we guilty? let us cry to him for remission through the blood of Christ. Are we in any strait or difficulty whatever? Our way is clear; let us wait upon God in assured expectation of succour and support. This promise shall never fail us^r: though we had *a million*^s of men or devils to encounter, we should be “more than conquerors^t.” “Believe in the Lord; so shall ye be established: believe his prophets; so shall ye prosper^u” *]

^l Rom. xi. 20, 21.

^o 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^r Heb. xi. 6.

^u 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^m 1 Cor. x. 12.

^p Ps. ii. 11.

^s 2 Chron. xiv. 9.

ⁿ Prov. xxviii. 14.

^q Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.

^t Rom. viii. 37.

* The subject may be further improved: 1. *For caution*, to guard against the evils which have already provoked God to chastise us; and 2. *for encouragement*, since, if he be for us, we need not fear, however many there may be against us.

CCCXXXIX. DEVOTION TO GOD URGED FROM A SENSE
OF GRATITUDE.

1 Sam. xii. 23, 24. *I will teach you the good and the right way. Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he has done for you.*

A ZEAL for the honour of God, and a concern for the welfare of men's souls, are the most striking features of a spiritual mind; and, when truly felt, will swallow up all selfish considerations, and take occasion, even from injuries received, to display their energy towards those who have injured us—This disposition was manifested in no small degree by the Prophet Samuel, who, having long been the teacher, the governor, and the deliverer of Israel, was deposed, though not by force, yet by the unanimous wishes of his nation, who desired to have a king after the manner of the surrounding nations—Instead of expressing any resentment against them for this indignity, he only enquired of them whether they could charge him with any mal-administration, and then assured them of a continued interest in his prayers, and exhorted them to serve the Lord with their whole hearts—

His words will naturally lead us to consider

I. The duty here inculcated

All, who believe the existence of God, acknowledge that he is worthy to be feared and served: but when our duty to him is practically enforced, too many cry out against it as the offspring of superstition and the parent of fanaticism—

Let us mark then with precision what our duty is

[To fear God, is, to regulate our conduct by the unerring standard of his word, avoiding carefully every thing which may displease him, and doing with diligence whatever is pleasing in his sight—But this must be done “*in truth*.” It is not a feigned obedience that will suffice: hypocritical services, however specious, must be odious to God: “He requireth truth in our inward parts:” and though “he will not be extreme to mark” our unavoidable infirmities, he will fearfully resent every instance of dissimulation: “He cannot be deceived and will not be mocked:” To be accepted of him, we must be “Israelites indeed, and without guile”—Moreover,

our

our services must be, not like the constrained obedience of a slave, but the willing expressions of filial regard; they must be done "*with all our heart*"—If, like "Amaziah, we did that which was *materially* right in the sight of the Lord, yet not with a perfect heart," it would be of no avail^a: We must, like Hezekiah, "do it with all our heart" if we would "prosper"^b—Nothing must be deemed too hard to do, or too great to suffer, that God may be glorified—David's direction to Solomon to "serve the God of his father with a *perfect heart* and *willing mind*," completely expresses the nature of our duty as it is inculcated in the text^c—]

Let us next observe the importance of this duty

[In the text it is said to be a *right*, and *good* and *necessary* way; and not only in comparison of other ways, but to the exclusion of all others—They indeed, who most faithfully enforce the practice of this duty, are often reproached as deceivers, that would impose upon weak minds, and lead astray the ignorant and unwary—The example of the world is urged in opposition to them as a better standard of right and wrong than the holy scriptures—Nevertheless we must insist with Samuel that this way is "*right*;" "the broad road" of sin and self-indulgence leads men to destruction; and "the narrow path alone of holiness and self-denial leadeth unto life"^d—Nor is this way merely despised, as erroneous; it is also reprobated, as pernicious; and both they who teach it and they who follow it, are often deemed the very bane of society—While the drunkard and the whoremonger are respected, and excused, "he that departeth from evil is considered as a prey^e," which all are at liberty to hunt and devour—But the testimony of Samuel, confirmed as it is by numberless other passages of holy writ, is sufficient to outweigh all that the blind votaries of sin and Satan can bring against religion—It is most assuredly, not only the right, but the "*good*" way; and though other ways may be more pleasing to flesh and blood, there is not any so productive of happiness, so perfective of our nature, or so conducive to the welfare of society—

Many, who feel convinced that fervent piety is both right and good, yet will not be persuaded that it is *necessary*—They acknowledge perhaps that ministers, and others who are detached from worldly engagements, should cultivate the fear of God: but a just attention to divine things seems to them incompatible with their own peculiar state and calling—

Let

^a 2 Chron. xxv. 2.

^b 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21.

^c 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

^d Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^e Isai. lix. 15.

Let none however imagine that any lawful calling is an impediment to religion: Adam even in Paradise had work assigned him by God himself, as being no less subservient to the welfare of his soul than to the health of his body ^f—The truth is, that religion is “the one thing needful;” nor though, like Samuel or David, we had a kingdom to govern, could we plead any exemption on account of the multiplicity or importance of our engagements: the word of God to every living creature is, “Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man ^g”—]

That while we acknowledge our duty we may also be led to practise it, let us consider

II. The argument with which it is enforced

The Jews were singularly indebted to God for their deliverance from Egypt, their preservation in the wilderness, their investiture in the promised land, and the many wonderful interpositions of the Deity on their behalf in the time of their judges—But waving any further mention of *them*, let us call to mind the mercies vouchsafed to *us*

1. The temporal

[Numberless are the blessings which every individual amongst us has received; as are those also, which are conferred upon the nation at large—But on the present occasion it will be proper to contemplate rather the privileges we enjoy in our corporate capacity ^h— — — And should not these operate as inducements to fidelity and diligence in the service of our God?—Does not every favour bestowed upon us address us, as it were, in the words of Samuel, “*Only* fear the Lord?” Does it not bind us also, according to the ability and opportunities afforded us, to teach others “the good and the right way?”—Instead then of making our situation an occasion for carnality, or an excuse for lukewarmness, let us endeavour to “render to the Lord according to the benefits he has conferred upon us”—]

2. The spiritual

[As the most signal mercies imparted to the Jewish nation were typical of far richer benefits reserved for the Christian church, we should but ill consult the scope of the text,

^f Gen. ii. 15.

^g Eccl. xii. 13.

^h If this were the subject of a *Commemoration* Sermon, the peculiar privileges that are enjoyed should here be stated: but if of a *Thanksgiving*, the special occasions for thankfulness should here be opened.

text, and still less the advancement of our eternal interests, if we should omit to mention our obligations to God for spiritual blessings—"Consider" then that stupendous act of mercy, *the gift of God's dear Son*: consider that he was given up to death, even the accursed death of the cross, for us sinners, for the recovery of our souls from death and hell, and for the restoration of them to the divine favour; how unfathomable the mystery! how incomprehensible the love! *The terms too upon which God will accept sinners*; how easy, how simple, how suited to our lost and helpless nature! We have only to "believe in Christ, and we shall be savedⁱ." Can any thing be more encouraging; or lay us under greater obligations to obedience?—Consider further, *the benefits we receive by believing*: we are instantly brought into the family of God; we enjoy sweet "fellowship with the Father and the Son;" we have the sting of death taken away; and we have an eternal inheritance in heaven: shall all this love have no constraining influence? shall it not cause us to present ourselves as living sacrifices to God, that we may both live to him who died for us, and glorify God with our bodies and our spirits which are his^k?—Yes; such were the sentiments of an inspired Apostle; nor can any rational being controvert or doubt such self-evident deductions—Let us then apply them in confirmation of the text, and fix them on our minds as motives to serve God with all our hearts—Let us put away that worldliness and sensuality, which are the bane and curse of our souls—Let us discard formality, that blinding, that deluding sin—Let us also abhor hypocrisy, that basest of all sins—Let us serve our God, not with a few outward ceremonies, but with the inward devotion of our hearts^l—Let us not study how we may contract our regards to him into the smallest possible space; but how we may glorify his name, and advance his interests—And while we thus cultivate the fear of him in our own hearts, let us, with Samuel, labour to the utmost, that he may be feared and served by all around us^m—]

ⁱ Acts xvi. 31.

^k 2 Cor. v. 14. Rom. xii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^l 1 John iii. 18.

^m Here, if it were judged proper, the connexion of our piety with the prosperity of the nation, as marked in the words following the text, might be urged as an additional, though inferior, motive to zeal and diligence.

CCCXL. GOD'S INTERPOSITIONS FOR US ARE OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE AND SERVE HIM.

Josh. xxiii. 10, 11. *The Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed to yourselves therefore, that ye love the Lord your God.*

MUCH as patriotism and valour are admired, and deservedly as, in many instances, they have been rewarded by men, they are of no value in the sight of God, if they be not accompanied with true piety—Their utility to the state of which we are members is undoubted; but their moral excellence depends on their union with religion—Abstracted from a regard to God, they are a mere compound of pride and selfishness; but, regulated by religion, they are in a high degree amiable and praise-worthy—Many bright examples of patriotism, united with piety, are set before us in the scriptures—But none shines with greater lustre than that of Joshua—When his whole nation was sinking under desponding fears, he encouraged them by his unshaken fortitude and confidence in God^a—And when he had vanquished all their enemies, and put them into the quiet possession of the promised land, he still improved his influence to confirm their faith, and to establish them in the paths of righteousness—The words before us are part of his dying address to all the elders of Israel—In applying them to the present occasion, we shall shew

I. To whom our successes have been owing

God has promised to interpose on behalf of those who wait upon him

[His promises to hear the prayers of individuals are numberless^b—

And the same are made also to repenting nations^c—]

His interpositions on behalf of our nation have been signally manifest

[We may be led to ascribe them to the valour of our forces, or the skill of our commanders—But it is God who endues them both with skill and courage, and gives the victory to whomsoever he will—Besides, there have been many peculiar circumstances

^a Numb. xiv. 6—9.

^b Matt. vii. 7.

^c 2 Chron. vii. 14.

circumstances which owed their origin to him alone—And, while these mark his providential care, they compel us to acknowledge that “it is he who fighteth for us^d”—]

Nor are we without a hope, that his mercies to us have been sent in accomplishment of his promise

[Many have mourned over the troubles of the land, and have made earnest intercession with God on our behalf—And though there is nothing *meritorious* in their petitions, yet when God sends the mercies for which we have prayed, we have reason to hope that he has sent them in answer to our prayers—]

Whatever may be our opinion respecting this, it becomes us to consider

II. The improvement we should make of them

Every mercy from God is an additional obligation to love and serve him

[God has commanded us to love him with all our heart—And he is worthy of our supreme regard on account of the perfections of his nature, and the dispensations of his grace—But he is also to be loved in a peculiar manner for hearing and answering our prayers^e—The effect produced on the mind of David, should result from every expression of the divine goodness towards us^f—]

But we are very prone to forget all his benefits

[However earnest we may be in a season of affliction, we become remiss and careless when the affliction is removed—We are like metal, which is melted in the furnace, but returns speedily to its original hardness as soon as it is taken from the fire—Like the Jews we “forget the Rock that bought us”—Even good “Hezekiah requited not the Lord according to all that he had done for him^g”—And too many amongst ourselves forget to pay the vows which we have offered in a time of trouble—]

On this account we should take good heed to remember them

[Nothing is more displeasing to God than ingratitude—Nor will he overlook it even in his most highly favoured servants^h—But “shall we thus requite the Lord?”—Let us rather survey with gratitude the mercies we have received—Let us habitually behold the hand of God in them—And let us anxiously enquire, “What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?”—]

This

^d Here the particular circumstances may be mentioned, and be illustrated by Ps. xlv. 3.

^e Ps. cxvi. 1.

^f Ps. xviii. 1, with the title of the Psalm.

^g 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

^h Ib.

This subject may teach us

1. Where to look for future successes

[If we look to our fleets and armies we may expect nothing but defeat—We are indeed to use all possible means of defence, but not to trust in any of them ⁱ—Our eyes must be directed unto God alone—“The battle is not ours but his”—“He can save by many or by few”—Were we ever so superior to our enemies he could bring us down like Sennacherib ^k; or if we were reduced to ever so low an ebb, he could render us victorious ^l—And it is certain that if we “walk in pride, he will abase” us, but if we humbly seek his aid, he will support and deliver us—]

2. Where to look for success in our spiritual warfare

[Were peace restored to our land, we yet should have a warfare to maintain—There never will be one moment’s truce with our spiritual enemies—The world, the flesh, and the devil will incessantly fight against us; and we must conflict with them even to the end—But God fighteth for those who put their trust in him—Let us call upon him, and he will clothe us with armour from the arsenal of heaven ^m—The Captain of our salvation will go forth with us to the battle—He will shield our head, and strengthen our arm, and make us “more than conquerors” over all—Let us then “love him” for the victories we have already gained—Let us take good heed to ourselves that we never rob him of his glory—Let us thankfully ascribe our every success to him ⁿ—And begin the song which we shall shortly sing in heaven, “Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ^o”—]

ⁱ Isai. xxii. 11.

^k Isai. x. 8—19.

^l Ib. ver. 4.

^m Eph. vi. 13.

ⁿ Ps. cxv. 1.

^o 1 Cor. xv. 57.

CCCXLI. THE DESIRABLENESS OF PEACE.

2 Thess. iii. 16. *Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.*

CONTENTIONS too naturally spring from our corrupt nature, the fruitful parent of every thing that is evil. There are indeed occasions when it is necessary to act in a manner that seems not pacific; and *that* too even towards those who call themselves the Lord’s people: if, for instance, any member of a Christian society were notoriously defective in any one branch of moral duty, and persisted in his misconduct notwithstanding the remonstrances

remonstrances of those who were both authorized and qualified to advise him, it would be necessary to cut off such a corrupt member from the church, and to cease from all needless or familiar intercourse with him, till he had repented of his wickedness^a. But these are only extreme cases, where milder means will not avail. As a general rule, we should strive to the utmost to walk in peace both towards those who are without, and them that are within, the church: the disposition of our hearts should exactly accord with the desire contained in the words before us.

The expressions in the text being general, it is not necessary to limit them to one particular point: we shall therefore take them in the most comprehensive sense as relating

I. To nations

[No language can fully express the miseries of war: it turns mankind into ferocious beasts, that seek only to overpower and destroy each other. It spreads desolation over whole countries. It cuts off thousands, and ten thousands in a day; and turns that into an occasion of joy and triumph, which ought rather to overwhelm us with distress and anguish. Even those who are not actively engaged with the enemy, are yet no light sufferers through the burthens which are imposed to support the war. Peace is, under God, the remedy of all these evils: not that it can ever repair the losses that have been sustained; but it prevents the progress of these evils, and restores to the world those friendly and commercial relations which war had interrupted^b. O that the governors of all nations did but know how to appreciate this invaluable blessing!

But whence can this blessing be obtained? It should seem that the termination of war depends wholly on the will of the contending parties. This indeed is true in some sense: but who shall make them willing? who shall put an end to their ambitious or vindictive projects? None but HE, "in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and who turneth them whithersoever he will^c:" HE alone can "break the bow, and cut the spear asunder^d." He who in righteous displeasure has "vexed us with adversity by means of war," he it is, even "the Lord of peace himself," who has now caused the din of war to cease, and "given us peace in our borders^e." O that he might give it us "*always*" and dispose us to seek it "*by all means!*" Whatever be the terms on which the contending parties

^a Ver. 14.

^d 1's. xlvi. 9. and lxxvi. 3.

^b Mic. iv. 3, 4. ^c Prov. xxi. 1.

^e 2 Chron. xv. 6. with Ps. cxlvii. 14.

parties have agreed to compose their differences, there will be some found, probably on both sides, to complain of them as below their just expectations. But it were better far to make sacrifices for peace than to persist in a destructive war: and better to exercise forbearance towards an offending enemy, than to precipitate a nation, without the most imperious necessity, into a renewal of such bloody conflicts. Peace retained almost *by any means*, is preferable to the calamities of war.]

II. To societies

[Scarcely is there any society of men on earth, where feuds and animosities do not awfully prevail. Nor is this true with respect to the unregenerate only; even in the church of God itself disputes and divisions are too often found^t. But, oh! how lamentable is it when the seamless coat of Christ is rent asunder: and the subjects of the Prince of Peace are engaged in mutual hostilities! Surely the most desirable of all blessings to any society whatever, and above all to the church of Christ, is peace.

But here again recurs the question, Who shall so govern the sinful passions of men as to bring them into habitual subjection? Who shall impose such restraints on all, as to make them “prefer, not every man his own, but every man another’s good?” No human wisdom or power can accomplish so great a work. He alone who has united Jews and Gentiles in one body, and slain their enmity, can enable *us* to “preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace^h.” He engaged to make the wolf and the lamb to dwell together in love and amityⁱ; and, when he shall see fit to exert his power, he will realize again what he once accomplished in Noah’s ark, and will unite the most contrary dispositions in the bonds of social affection^k.

Happy are the societies, the families, the churches, that are governed by such a spirit. Happy indeed if they could “always” enjoy uninterrupted harmony! It is the interest of all the members of a body to forget, as it were, their own individual concerns, and to conspire together for the general good; all using for that end whatever means appear most suitable to the attainment of it. Is forbearance requisite? or friendly rebuke? or even the amputation of an offending member? Every one should be ready to do his part, whatever it may be, and, by his individual exertion, to promote to the utmost the peace
and

^f 1 Cor. i. 10. and iii. 3.

^g Phil. ii. 4. 1 Cor. x. 24.

^h Eph. ii. 14—17. and iv. 3.

ⁱ Isai. xi. 6—9.

^k The oil poured upon the head of our great high priest, shall descend to the skirts of his clothing, Ps. cxxxiii. 1, 2.

and welfare of the whole body. As no means would be left untried for the extinction of flames that threatened the destruction of a city; so should none be omitted, that may secure from injury the union and happiness of mankind¹.

Let all of us then look to "the Lord of peace himself," that by the influence of his grace these holy dispositions may be wrought within us; and that through the mighty working of his Spirit we may every one of us supply our part toward the compacting together of all the members, in order that the whole body may be edified in love^m.]

III. To individuals

[Whatever be the state of the nation in which we live, or of the society in which our lot is cast, we are concerned at least to obtain peace in our own souls, and to preserve it "*always by all possible means.*" What can ever make us happy if our conscience be disquieted with a sense of guilt, and with apprehensions of God's wrath? Or, "if God have given us quietness, who, or what, can make troubleⁿ?"

As far as respects inward tranquillity of mind, all are agreed in esteeming it the richest blessing, and in desiring to possess it. But the generality of men are lamentably mistaken with respect to the means by which it is to be obtained. Some hope to find it by dissipating all thoughts of the eternal world: some by silencing all the convictions of their conscience: some by abounding in the external duties of religion: and some by "healing their wounds slightly, and saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace^o." But true peace can never be obtained but from Jesus, "the Prince of Peace^p." He it is that has purchased it for his believing people^q; and that has left it them as his best legacy, saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace give I unto you^r."

But though this peace is the gift of Christ, we must seek it in the use of means. We must humble ourselves before him for the multitude of our offences; and turn from our transgressions with an unfeigned abhorrence of them. Above all we must view Jesus as making atonement for us, and as reconciling us to God by the blood of his cross. We must renounce all self-righteous methods of appeasing God's anger, or of pacifying the clamours of a guilty conscience. We must trust in Jesus alone; and in him with our whole hearts^s: and when he has "spoken peace to our souls, we must no more return to folly^t." Then shall we have that "peace which passeth

¹ By mutual forbearance, Col. ii. 12—15.; by fervent intercession, Ps. cxxii. 6—8.

^m Rom. xiv. 19. Eph. iv. 16.

^o Jer. vi. 14.

^q Col. i. 21, 22.

^s Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

ⁿ Job xxxiv. 29.

^p Isai. ix. 6.

^r John xiv. 27.

^t Ps. lxxxv. 8.

passeth all understanding," and enjoy it "*always,*" in life, in death, and for ever.

Let nothing then be esteemed painful that may be necessary for the acquiring or preserving of so rich a blessing; but let us seek it at the Lord's hands, "*always and by all means*."⁴]

⁴ By mortification of sin, Isai: lvii. 19—21.; by fervent prayer, Phil. iv. 6, 7.; by glorifying God with our substance, Isai. lviii. 7—11.

CCCXLII. HEZEKIAH'S THANKSGIVING FOR HIS RECOVERY.

Isai. xxxviii. 20. *The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments, all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.*

TO make public acknowledgments to God for national mercies is a duty so evident, that persons of all characters and denominations are forward to the performance of it. The very heathens thought that they had not properly testified their joy on account of any signal victories or deliverances, till they had made some public procession to the temples of their deities, or offered sacrifices to their honour. A greater cause for thankfulness than that which we are now assembled to commemorate, England scarce ever saw. A Sovereign, who for his amiable qualities in domestic life stands almost unrivalled; a sovereign, who is truly the father of his people; a sovereign, who is, if I may so speak, the idol of the nation which he governs, is restored *to health* from the most afflictive of all disorders, and *to the government of his kingdom* at the very moment it was to be transferred to other hands: what cause for joy and thankfulness is this! And indeed ye have already in some measure testified your joy; and I would hope the reality was as universal as the appearance: but surely we should not rest satisfied with such demonstrations of joy; we should have our lamps trimmed and our lights burning *within* us: we should have a sacred flame kindled in our hearts; and we should endeavour to excite others to rejoice with us. When David (Ps. xxii. 22—25.)

was brought, as he tells us, into the dust of death, and, in answer to his prayer, was delivered from it, he said, "I will declare thy name *unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation* will I praise thee. Ye that fear the Lord praise him; all ye, the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him all ye the seed of Israel: for he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him, but when he cried unto him, he heard: my praise shall be of thee *in the great congregation*; I will pay my vows *before them that fear him.*" Now such should be the desire of our hearts to glorify God for the King's recovery: not contented with offering up our praises in secret, we should say with him in the text, "the Lord was ready to save; therefore we will sing our songs *in the house of the Lord.*"

In discoursing upon these words, we will consider

I. The import of the words

This will partly appear from *the occasion* on which they were uttered

[This chapter begins with a very affecting account of king Hezekiah's sickness: a message was sent to him from the Lord, to tell him that he should die of his disorder. These melancholy tidings no sooner reached his ears than he turned his face towards the wall and wept very sore. In the 9th and following verses we have a copy of what he himself wrote concerning the workings of his own mind under that affliction: "The writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness: I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years: I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world: mine age is departed and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent; I have cut off, like a weaver, my life; he will cut me off with pining sickness, from day even to night will he make an end of me: I reckoned till morning that as a lion so will he break all my bones, from day even to night will he make an end of me: like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes failed with looking upwards; O Lord I am oppressed, undertake for me."

Now it is possible enough that he was, in a considerable degree, under bondage to the fear of death: but yet we cannot suppose that all this grief originated from that one cause: no, he doubtless felt much for the glory of God and the prosperity

perity of his people, both of which, as far as he could judge, would be very materially affected by his removal at that particular crisis. He was one of the best kings that ever governed the Jewish nation. No sooner did he come to the throne than he began to reform the abuses which had been introduced in preceding reigns. He threw down the altars that had been built; he opened and repaired the temple which had been shut up and left to decay; he restored the sacrifices which had been long neglected; he stirred up the people throughout all the kingdom to reform their lives; and he ardently longed to see these beginnings of reformation carried further into effect. He had very lately beheld the whole country overrun by Sennacherib's army, and Jerusalem itself reduced to the utmost distress and danger; and though he had seen a great part of the Assyrian army destroyed by the hand of God, yet he knew that the Assyrians were still a powerful enemy, and that if the Jewish nation should relapse into their former wickedness, they could not expect another miraculous interposition from God. He was aware also that having no son to succeed him, there would probably be intestine divisions about a successor; so that if he were taken away at this time, the cause of religion would be neglected, and the whole Jewish nation be given over to suffer the consequences of their apostasy from God. That these reflections greatly contributed to his grief, seems plainly intimated in the answer which God gave to his prayer, as it is recorded both in 2 Kings xx. 6. and in the chapter before us; in both of which places God not only promises to prolong his life, but to deliver the city out of the hands of the king of Assyria, and to defend it for his own name's sake. Afflicted with these gloomy prospects he betook himself to the best of all remedies, *prayer*: and as we are expressly told that Isaiah joined with him in crying to heaven on a former occasion, it is reasonable to suppose that, when he saw the king so overwhelmed with the news which he had brought him, he did not neglect this opportunity of joining with him in prayer, for his recovery. Behold, their prayer prevailed; yea, so speedily did it prevail, that before Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "Tell Hezekiah, thus saith the Lord; I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears, behold, I will heal thee." God moreover commanded the Prophet to make a plaster of figs, and to put it upon the boil, and to assure the king that in three days he should be well enough to go up to the house of the Lord. This was done to shew that we ought to use means, while at the same time we look not to the means, but to God, for the desired success. Being restored to health he comes into the house of the Lord, and pours out his soul in pious and devout thanksgivings: knowing that, if he had died in his illness,

illness, he should never have had any more opportunities of glorifying God before men, he exclaims, "the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee, they that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth; the living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day; the father to the children shall make known thy truth:" and then he adds in the words of the text, "The Lord was ready to save me, therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord."]

But we shall have a further insight into the meaning of the text, if we consider more particularly the words themselves

[They contain a thankful acknowledgment to God for his recovery, and a determination to glorify him for it as long as he should live. "The Lord was ready to save me," says the king. He does not blasphemously ascribe his recovery to his physicians, or to the means used, notwithstanding they were used according to God's own prescription; but he gives the honour, where alone it is due, to God. In disorders of any kind our eyes should not be so fixed upon the creature as they usually are; our expectation should be from God alone: it is "he who killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up." But that which Hezekiah seems to have been more particularly affected with, was the Lord's *readiness* to help him; "the Lord was ready to save me." This is a matter of astonishment to all who have ever tried the power and prevalency of prayer: God does not indeed bind himself to answer prayer immediately, at least not in the way in which we expect it to be answered; yet does he often with marvellous condescension grant the requests of his people as soon as they are offered up; he often visibly fulfils that precious promise recorded in Isaiah, "It shall come to pass that before they call I will answer, and while they are yet speaking I will hear." David mentions this as his own experience, and seems to have been struck with it as Hezekiah was; "I will praise thee with my whole heart, O God; for in *the day* when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul. (Ps. cxxxviii. 1, 3.) So Hezekiah in the text; "the Lord was ready to save me; therefore will we sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life, in the house of the Lord." He determined that as the mercy vouchsafed to him was a public benefit, so he would manifest his sense of it by public acknowledgments. He recorded this mercy and had it set to music, that all the nation might join with him in singing praises to God for it. Nor would he suffer it ever to be effaced from his memory: he made the recital of this mercy a part of his daily devotions; and determined he would continue to do so

as long as he should live; judging very properly that his life, which had been so miraculously spared, should be spent wholly in the service of his God.]

Nothing more being necessary to illustrate the meaning of the words, we shall pass on to notice

II. The use we should make of them

1. To excite our gratitude for the King's recovery

[There is a striking resemblance between the event which we are now met to commemorate^a, and that recorded in the passage before us. I will beg leave to point it out in several particulars.

It holds good *in the persons who were ill*. Hezekiah, you have heard, was one of the most illustrious kings that ever sat upon the Jewish throne: the glory of God and the welfare of his people were ever near his heart. He set a good example to all his subjects, and ardently desired to see them no less obedient to their God than loyal to himself: he published his edicts prohibiting whatever was offensive to God, and enforcing the observance of the divine laws: in short, if you would know his character, see it drawn by the inspired penman, 2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21. "Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought that which was good, and right, and truth before the Lord his God: and in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments to seek his God, *he did it with all his heart* and prospered." Now compare that of our gracious Sovereign: he has but limited power, and therefore cannot effect all he would; but what he would do, if he were able, we see by the proclamation which was not long since issued. But this is a part of our subject on which it would not be proper to say much, nor is it needful that we should; for we trust his excellent qualities are too deeply engraven in all our hearts to need any repetition of them from this place—

But further—The resemblance holds good *in the probable consequences of their illness*—Hezekiah was sick nigh unto death, so that till his recovery he was utterly incapacitated for the business of the nation. If he had been left in the state he was, or had been taken away, his subjects would have suffered an irreparable loss. What they would have suffered we may judge in part from what they did actually suffer, when Manasses the son of Hezekiah came to the throne: idolatry was re-established throughout the kingdom; and God, wearied as it were with the greatness of their provocations, gave them over, together with Manasses their king, into the hands of their Babylonish enemies. What would have been the
consequence

^a March 15th, 1789.

consequence if our Sovereign's illness had continued, none can tell. We mean not to cast reflections upon any person or party; we would abhor a party-spirit either in religion or politics: but this we may say without a possibility of giving offence to any; that, however wisely the defect of an executive power might have been supplied, and however faithfully it might have been employed, still the nation would have suffered an almost irreparable injury; for the very sinews of government would have been cut asunder. This, we say, would have been the case, supposing that every thing had been planned with the most consummate wisdom, and executed with the most unblemished integrity: but what *might* have happened, God alone knows: blessed be his name! he has delivered us now from the apprehensions of the calamities we have so earnestly deprecated, and so justly dreaded.

Again—The resemblance holds good *in the means by which they were recovered from their illness*. What was there in a plaster made of figs that could give so sudden a turn to a mortal disorder as to remove it in three days? Just as much as there was in the waters of Jordan to cleanse Naaman from his leprosy, or in the clay and spittle which our Lord used, to open the eyes of a blind man. It was prayer that healed Hezekiah; yes, prayer pierced the skies and entered into the ears of the Lord of hosts. "I have heard thy prayer, said God, and have seen thy tears, and will heal thee." And what has healed our gracious Sovereign? we answer without disparagement to any, PRAYER: a spirit of prayer has been poured out upon all God's people throughout the nation: all that have an interest in the court of heaven, have cried day and night to God on his behalf. The prayers of the church prevailed for the delivering of Peter out of prison: so we doubt not but that the king's recovery is an answer to prayer; to the prayers of those very people, who yet are too often hated, despised, and persecuted. It is true; God has used means; but what means? not the art of medicine, but repose and quiet. We mean not to detract from the merit of those who have assisted in his cure; they deserve well of the nation at large; and we shall rejoice to see them rewarded according to their desert: but the glory is God's, and his alone: the King's recovery is the gift of God; and *that* in answer to the prayers of his own people; and, we trust, that they will not discontinue their prayers for him even to the latest hour of their lives.

Once more—The resemblance holds good *in the readiness with which God vouchsafed the desired mercy*. Hezekiah's and Isaiah's prayer was answered before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court; and in three more days the cure was effected. So has it been with respect to the cure vouchsafed unto our

our Sovereign ; it was withheld for a season, just to make all praying people earnest in their supplications. The rod impending over the nation seemed for some time ready to fall : yet was the stroke by various occurrences providentially delayed : and then at the very moment that it was *expected* to fall, behold ! deliverance comes : so truly may the words of the text be applied to this event, “ the Lord was *ready* to save.” Surely that proverb has been again verified to us, that “ in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen ;” for God did not deliver Isaac more seasonably from the hand of Abraham, than he has done us from the calamities which threatened us.

Now if the occasions for joy and thankfulness are so similar, ought not our expressions of thankfulness to be similar also ? Ought we not to render unto God according to the benefits he hath conferred upon us ? Yes surely. Did Hezekiah then make his deliverance a matter of universal praise ? let us stir up both ourselves and others to a devout and holy joy on account of the recovery of our king. Did he determine that he would make it a subject of public thanksgiving ? let us do the same : and did he determine to remember it and sing of it all his days ? let us endeavour to keep upon our minds a lively sense of this mercy, and not provoke God to withdraw it from us by our ingratitude.]

2. To excite our gratitude for the mercies of redemption

[We all without exception are sick nigh unto death : what Isaiah says of the Jews is applicable to every nation upon earth ; “ the whole head,” says he, “ is sick ;” that is, the kings, and nobles, and all the governors in church and state, are infected with a mortal disease ; “ and the whole heart is faint,” that is, the people at large, without any exception, are dying of the same malady : “ from the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores.” Sin is this deadly disorder, and, unless we be recovered from it, the consequence must be dreadful to us all. We are not left to conjecture what this may be ; we know ; we know for certain ; we know that no temporal calamity whatever can be compared with it : we know that our disorder, if not speedily cured, must issue in everlasting death ; in an everlasting separation of soul and body from God, and in an everlasting suffering of divine vengeance. But we are fully warranted to say with Hezekiah in the text, “ the Lord is ready to save us.” Of all the thousands and tens of thousands who came to our Lord for healing when he was on earth, not so much as one applied in vain : nor did ever any one call upon him for spiritual healing without experiencing his readiness to save. And is he not “ the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ?” Would Jesus ever have come

down from heaven, if he had not been ready to save? Would he have shed his precious blood for us, if he had not been ready to save? Would he have sent his word, his ministers, and his holy Spirit, to invite and draw us to him, if he had not been ready to save? Has he not said, "As I live I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways, for why will ye die?" And would he thus have sworn, invited, intreated, and expostulated, if he had not been ready to save? Beloved brethren, would to God that you would all put him to the trial! not one of you would then ever perish in your sins; he would cleanse you in his blood from all sin; he would restore your souls to health; and make them to flourish in immortal youth and beauty. Do you ask, How shall I obtain this blessing? We answer, just as the king of Judah, or the king of Britain, were restored to health: means were used for both; but the means were very inadequate to the end which was to be obtained: that which prevailed for both, was prayer; and that shall prevail for you. If you were like Jonah at the bottom of the sea in a whale's belly, the prayer of faith should deliver you. Still however you must use the means; attend to the word that is preached; and read the Bible in your closets: but do not imagine that these means can convert your souls: no; *that* is the Lord's work; and you will use all means in vain, if you do not beg of God to render them effectual. But if you pray, you will find the Lord far more ready to give, than you are to ask. To save sinners is his work, his office, his delight; it is "the joy which was set before him, in expectation of which he endured the cross and despised the shame:" yea, it is the import of his very name; for he was "called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins." This is a perpetual ground of joy to all; it calls for our devoutest thanks and praises: it should make us all adopt the language of the text, and say, "the Lord is ready to save me; therefore will I sing songs to him all the days of my life, in the house of the Lord."

But if you *have been* restored to health; if you have experienced his salvation; if upon a review of your past life you can say with Hezekiah, "The Lord *was* ready to save me;" what ought to be the frame of *your* mind? how should you give thanks! the Psalmist says, "Let them give thanks whom the Lord hath redeemed;" and if *they* will not, who will? The angels were not half so much indebted to him, as they for whom he shed his blood. "O then give thanks, give thanks unto our God; for it becometh well the just to be thankful:" "O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the God of our salvation."]

AN ANALYSIS OF THE FOREGOING SERMON.

[*The Author had at one time thought of inserting a considerable number of short sketches; but he relinquished the idea, from an apprehension that they would not afford sufficient aid to those, whose more immediate benefit he consulted. The following Analysis is added as a specimen.*]

PUBLIC acknowledgments of national mercies are proper—

The king's recovery is a just ground for them at this time—

I. The import of the words—In which observe

1. The occasion of them—Here notice

[Hezekiah's illness, and dread of approaching death—

His character, as most concerned for God's glory and the national warfare—

The probable consequences of his death—

The means of his recovery: prayer—figs—

His expressions of thankfulness for it—]

2. The words themselves—These contain

[*The grounds of his thankfulness; That God had restored him—And that he had been ready to do so—*

The expressions of it—He would give all the glory to God—He would do it publicly—He would have others to do the same—He would do it all his life—]

II. The use we should make of them

1. To excite our gratitude for the king's recovery

[*The occasions are similar; As to the persons that were ill—(compare Hezekiah, and the king) As to the probable consequences of their not recovering—As to the means used for their recovery, PRAYER—And as to the readiness of God to comply with our requests—*

Our gratitude should be similar; Public—universal—fervent—perpetual—]

2. To excite our gratitude for the mercies of redemption

[*All are sick nigh unto death—The consequences of not recovering will be dreadful—The Lord is ready to heal us—PRAYER is the grand mean of recovery—All should rejoice; The sick, that the Lord is ready to save; The recovered, that he was, and still is, ready—]*

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